STATES AT RISK

AMERICA'S PREPAREDNESS REPORT CARD

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America's Preparedness Report Card Shows States Largely Unprepared to Face Future Extreme Weather Risk

Washington, D.C. (November 18, 2015) – A new report released today shows that states across the country are largely unprepared to face the significant and increasing risks posed by changing levels of extreme weather, including: extreme heat, drought, wildfires, inland flooding and coastal flooding threats. *States at Risk: America's Preparedness Report Card (www.statesatrisk.org),* prepared by the States at Risk Project, a collaboration of ICF International and Climate Central, is the first-ever quantitative assessment of its kind. The report is designed to help provide a benchmark for states to assess risks and build and implement action plans to increase their preparedness levels.

"This report card lays it out plain and simple: very few states have taken sufficient action to prepare for future changes in weather patterns that are already impacting us - and if we don't take action now it will only get worse," said **former Alaska Senator Mark Begich**. "In Alaska, we have already seen the impacts of climate change firsthand and that is why we have taken steps to address threats like coastal erosion and ocean acidification. But we are not alone - from coastal flooding that threatens property and lives in Florida to extreme heat decimating crops and endangering vulnerable people in Ohio – we must take action. We have the opportunity to invest in preparedness today, but if we wait, we risk paying the higher costs of recovery tomorrow."

"Across the United States, extreme weather poses a significant risk to the U.S. economy, infrastructure and lives, and the costs of recovery are taking an increasingly large economic toll on federal, state and local coffers," said **Taxpayers for Common Sense Vice President Steve Ellis**. "Since the 1980s, the annual number of disasters with a price tag exceeding $1 billion has nearly tripled, from less than three to more than eight a year. Planning and taking steps to address these inevitable disasters cuts long-term costs, reduces impacts and ensures

states and communities can more quickly rebound from losses. Rather than continue to write big checks post-disaster, we as a nation must invest in ourselves to become less vulnerable."

These threats particularly affect the elderly, the impoverished and other vulnerable populations. For instance, Arizona has nearly 200,000 people 65 years and older or under 5 years old living below the poverty line – making them especially vulnerable to extreme heat.

States at Risk provides a grade to each of the 50 states based on the unique profile of threats the state faces. Grades are based on both the magnitude of the current and future threat and the action states have taken to prepare for them relative to other states.

"This is the most comprehensive assessment that has ever been done to catalogue how prepared each state is given its unique climate risk profile," said **University of Arizona professor Kathy Jacobs**. "It is critically important that states not only recognize the changing nature of the threats they face, but also that they chart a course towards greater preparedness. This report card helps with that."

Key findings related to the risks states face from the threats of extreme heat, drought, wildfires, inland and coastal flooding include:

- **Florida, Texas, and California are the most at risk states.** Florida ranks first for both inland and coastal flooding threats and second in terms of extreme heat. Texas faces four threats and is first in extreme heat, drought, and wildfire. California faces all five threats. It ranks second in wildfire and inland flooding and third in extreme heat.
- **The most pervasive threat to the 48 states in the continental U.S. is that of extreme heat** – heat wave days are projected to *more than triple* by 2050 in every state except Oregon. This is particularly true in the southeast and Gulf Coast, where the annual number of days of dangerous heat are projected to skyrocket by 2050: nearly doubling in Texas, more than tripling in Louisiana and Mississippi and quintupling in Florida to a grueling 130 days a year, up from the current 26.
- **A growing wildfire threat is concentrated in four states: Texas, California, Arizona, and Nevada, where more than 35 million people live in the high threat zone where wildlands and development converge**. Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia combine for another 15 million people at risk. And, the threat of wildfire is growing in the Southeast: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi are all projected to face above average increases in threat level.
- **Today, Texas faces the greatest summer drought threat**. By 2050, however, nine states – Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Texas,

Washington and Wisconsin – are projected to have greater drought threat levels than Texas has today.

"Responding after a natural catastrophe occurs is extraordinarily expensive, not least of all, in the number of lives that may be lost," said **Carl Hedde, Senior Vice President, Head of Risk Accumulation at Munich Reinsurance America, Inc.** "It is unquestionable that investing before disaster strikes, to both mitigate and prevent loss, is good public policy. This report card is an important step in helping each state assess its strengths and weaknesses, and then focus its limited resources on strategies and actions that will reduce current risks and measurably improve disaster resilience for the long term."

The report further finds that very few states have taken sufficient action to prepare for future threats. Though most states are reasonably prepared for the threats they face today, levels of preparedness vary greatly by state and by threat.

Key preparedness findings include:

- **States are least prepared for extreme heat risk.** All states in the continental U.S. face this threat, but only 14 percent are taking strong action to prepare.
- **States are more prepared for coastal flooding than any other risk**, but still only half of all coastal states are taking strong action to prepare for this risk.
- **More than half of all states assessed have taken no action to plan for future climate-related inland flooding risks or taken action to address them.**
- **Only a small group of states** – Alaska, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York and Pennsylvania – **has taken strong action to prepare for future risks across the threats they face**, including assessing future climate vulnerabilities and designing and implementing plans to address them.

States that received an overall A or A- grade include: California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Pennsylvania. States that received an overall F grade include: Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada and Texas.

"Flooding is our most frequent and costly disaster. Data points like those in this report provide state officials with what they need most: information about current and future risks that will help them identify specific hazard mitigation actions they can take to prevent future losses," said **Larry Larson, Director Emeritus and Senior Policy Advisor, Association of State Floodplain Managers.** "The Report Card shows the need to improve state level capacity for disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation and to invest in mitigation in order to

reduce the future loss of life, property and public infrastructure and the related costs for taxpayers."

For a full list of state grades, visit www.statesatrisk.org.

About *States at Risk: America's Preparedness Report Card*

States at Risk: America's Preparedness Report Card is the first-ever quantitative assessment of how prepared the 50 states are to face risks posed by changing levels of extreme heat, drought, wildfires, inland flooding and coastal flooding linked to climate change. The Report Card is designed to help provide a path forward for states to assess risks and build and implement action plans to increase their preparedness levels. Learn more at www.statesatrisk.org.

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