

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**RISING SEAS DISPROPORTIONATELY THREATEN GULF'S POOREST**

*Online Tool Details Threats Down to Zip Code*

New Embeddable Sea Level Rise Map and Projections for State

PRINCETON, N.J. — Ten years after Hurricane Katrina, the poorest Gulf state residents continue to face a disproportionate threat from coastal flooding as oceans rise, according to three new reports on the impacts of sea level rise in [Louisiana](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Alabama](#) released today by Climate Central. Across these states, and mostly in Louisiana, 75,000 socially vulnerable people live on land less than 6 feet above today's high tide line, are unprotected by levees, and face greater than 50 percent chances of flooding at this level from a combination of storm surge and sea level rise over the next 50 years.

That is based on a moderate sea level rise scenario from the U.S. National Climate Assessment. Based on the fastest scenario, sites in Louisiana face greater than 60 percent chances of flooding above 6 feet over the next 25 years.

Social vulnerability is defined as being uniquely less able to prepare for or respond to hazards like sea level rise and flooding, and is driven first and foremost by factors related to low income and wealth.

Overall across the three states, 265,000 people, \$17.5 billion in property and 2,340 EPA-listed sites — sources of potential contamination, including 586 hazardous waste sites — are at risk below 6 feet. If potential protection provided by levees is ignored, those numbers balloon to 1.2 million people, \$48.9 billion, and 6,518 EPA sites, including 3,454 for hazardous waste. More than 89 percent of population and contamination source exposure is in Louisiana. Report methodology likely overstates levee protection, as it assumes all levees in FEMA and Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority databases are sound through at least 10 feet above high tide lines. Most survey points included in data for non-FEMA levees are below 6 feet.

“Sea level rise means more floods, reaching higher — and that’s already happening today,” said Dr. Benjamin Strauss, study lead and Climate Central’s vice president for sea level and climate impacts. “In the Gulf states, just as we saw in Katrina, the poorest people with the least resources to cope live in the lowest-lying places and face the biggest threats from rising floods.”



[Click here to explore embeddable map](#)

Climate Central's interactive tool offers new research results in unprecedented detail, mapping threats from neighborhood to state level, by decade, and for more than 100 topics, from schools to hospitals to heavy infrastructure. The independent research group

blended global sea level projections with local trends to get sea level and flood forecasts tailored to each state.

**Dr. Strauss will be available for interviews from 12-1 and 2-3 p.m. Eastern time today (August 20) and is reachable by phone (609-613-0832) or email ([bstrauss@climatecentral.org](mailto:bstrauss@climatecentral.org)).**

Over the past 20 years, sea level has been rising at nearly double the 20th century average rate. Research published in May 2014 indicates that the West Antarctic Ice Sheet [may have begun an unstoppable collapse](#) that will lead to [10-plus feet of rise](#) over centuries, the maximum range of Climate Central's map and analysis. Further Antarctic research published [this week](#) increases projections for 21st century sea level rise.

Drawing on data from more than 10 federal agencies, Climate Central is developing research and tools for every coastal state. This launch adds Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, [bringing the total complete to 21, plus Washington, D.C.](#) Previous coverage includes [USA Today](#), [AP](#), and [The New York Times](#).

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