

# Losses from 2017 weather disasters hit record \$306B; death toll at 362

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The U.S. endured an atmospheric thrashing in 2017, experiencing its third warmest year on record, \$306 billion in losses and 362 deaths from a glut of weather-related disasters that [spread misery coast to coast](#).

An annual [climate and weather summary](#) released Monday by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration tallied the monetary damages done by 16 catastrophic weather events this past year to a new high that shattered the previous record of \$215 billion set in 2005.

For Florida, 2017's disaster scorecard includes Category 4 Hurricane Irma, a March freeze, and a January tornado outbreak that sent one twister tearing through Palm Beach Gardens and Juno Beach with winds up to 110 mph.

Few states escaped 2017 unscathed by weather's wrath, but 14 bore the brunt with each suffering at least \$1 billion in damages from a range of weather calamities including wildfires, tropical cyclones, floods and crop-killing drought.

The report shows 362 people were killed during weather-related events, including 251 in tropical cyclones. Researchers said they would update the death toll as more information is released, including from Puerto Rico where death statistics from Maria are in question.

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“It was a historic year for billion-dollar climate and weather disasters,” said Adam Smith, an economist with NOAA's National Center for Environmental Information. “The nation is weather- and climate-conscious for good reason as each geographical region faces a set of unique hazards.”

Irma caused estimated losses of \$50 billion, making it the fifth most expensive hurricane in records dating to 1980, according to NOAA. Hurricane Harvey, which wrought devastating flooding in Texas, cost \$125 billion, making it second costliest to 2005's Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Maria's raking of Puerto Rico ranks it as the third costliest hurricane with an estimated \$90 billion in losses.

The past year also ended as runner-up for hottest on record for the Sunshine State after a mid-December cold snap knocked 2017 off the contender list for first place.

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"This is still a significant three-year warm stretch," said Florida's State Climatologist David Zierden. "Each of the last three years, the statewide temperature is ranked in the top three since 1895."

The average temperature in 2017 statewide was 72.8 degrees, which is 2.7 degrees above the 20th century average, but not enough to beat 2015, which holds the top hot spot at 73.4 degrees. In third place for record warm temperatures is 2016 at 72.5 degrees.

Zierden said December ended 3.1 degrees above normal, continuing a 22-month streak of warmer than normal temperatures for Florida.

West Palm Beach had its fifth warmest year in 2017 with an average temperature of 77 degrees as measured at Palm Beach International Airport. It also broke 28 high temperature records, most of which were for record-warm overnights.

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"If you look at the top 10 warmest years in West Palm Beach, five of them have occurred just this decade," said Chris Fisher, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Miami. "That's certainly something significant."

Monday's report covers the contiguous U.S. with temperature records that date back to 1895.

NOAA scientists noted that while 2017 was the third warmest year on average for the contiguous U.S., every state also experienced above normal temperatures with five states experiencing record heat. Those were Arizona, Georgia, New Mexico, North Carolina and South Carolina.

Thirty-two additional states had annual temperatures that ranked among the 10 warmest on record.

“The general picture is that the warming over long term is related to larger-scale warming that we’ve seen on a global scale,” said Deke Arndt, chief of the monitoring section of NCEI. “The U.S. will have more year-to-year variability as it bounces up and down, but the long-term signal is tied with long-term warming.”

A summary of global temperatures in 2017 is scheduled for release Jan. 18.

Colin Polsky, director of Florida Atlantic University’s Center for Environmental Studies, said the annual temperature reports shouldn’t be disregarded, especially by Floridians.

“More warmth means more ice melting, which means higher ocean levels,” Polsky said.

“That’s a problem for a very low-lying and flat state.”

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