

Recap of Summer 2021 Climate News

Flooding and heat wave events made headlines across the world this summer. Below is a recap of significant climate events from which countries are recovering.



2021 Flooding in Germany (Sebastian Schmitt/dpa via AP, File)

June

The so-called 1000-year heatwave event in western North America was named the deadliest weather event ever recorded in the area. The town of Lytton broke the Canadian heat record while California Death Valley reached 55 C. Wildfires were triggered across both regions, subsequently causing air quality emergencies and worsening drought. The Southwestern US drought has now persisted for two decades and drinking water reservoir levels have declined to all time lows. (1) (2)

July

12 July Germany flooding

Flooding shocked Western Germany and Europe this summer as two months worth of rainfall fell in two days onto soil that was already saturated. At least 209 people died as rivers overflowed their banks and swept through entire towns and villages. Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, and France were all affected. (3) (4).

17 July China flooding

Henan province and city of Zhengzhou were particularly affected by flooding in China this July. Over 300 people died in Zhengzhou alone as the subway lines and city streets filled with water. Heavier rainfall

occurs because the warmer atmosphere from increasing global temperatures holds more moisture, which links these catastrophic flooding events directly to the climate crisis. (3)

Mid-July flash floods in London were followed by record heat that scientists predict will become the new norm in summer months. (8)

Greenland experienced a heatwave at the end of July and into August that saw temperatures rise 10 degrees above seasonal norms. The heatwave caused unprecedented rain at the centre of the ice sheet where temperatures usually remain far below freezing. Ice sheet melting has accelerated to two billion tons a day and contributes to rising ocean levels. (6) (7)

Madagascar is experiencing its worst drought in the past 40 years. Millions of people are facing loss of access to food as parasites claim what vegetation has survived the heat. (9)

Record heat waves have persisted in Italy and the Mediterranean in late July and August. Wildfires throughout southern Greece caused millions to evacuate and destroyed homes and livelihoods. (4)

August

India experienced the highest 24-hour rainfall on their records as monsoons swept through the Mumbai region and triggered landslides. (3)

Heavy rains also overtook southwestern Japan in mid-August. Mudslides and flooding caused evacuations for 4 million residents. At least three people are known to have died and others are still missing. (5)

Flooding from Hurricane Ida has caused flooding in several states in the US and most notably in New York where commuters were stranded in subway lines. (3)

One common theme across the 2021 summer climate events is that wealthier nations were much more affected than they previously have been. Questions have been raised about designing infrastructure to withstand future events of similar magnitudes and making policy changes that will slow global warming. The climate conference hosted by Scotland in November is now approaching and many are looking to representatives of countries to provide answers to these questions.

1. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/event-tracker/preliminary-analysis-concludes-pacific-northwest-heat-wave-was-1000-year>
2. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/08/summer-2021-climate-change-records/619887/>
3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2021/world-floods-climate/>
4. <https://phys.org/news/2021-08-deadly-summer-extreme-weather-climate.html>
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/15/japan-floods-death-toll-grows-as-rain-triggers-fresh-landslides>
6. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/event-tracker/late-summer-heatwave-and-rain-greenlands-summit>
7. <https://phys.org/news/2021-07-heatwave-massive-greenland-ice-sheet.html>

8. <https://theconversation.com/how-summer-2021-has-changed-our-understanding-of-extreme-weather-165268>
9. <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/148636/drought-in-madagascar>