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# Climate change-related injuries will kill thousands in the US

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By [Adam Vaughan](#)



**Accidental deaths in the US from drowning and car crashes may rise as the climate warms**  
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The US is likely to see more than 2000 extra deaths a year from car accidents, suicide, drowning and other fatal injuries because of climate change, even if the world manages to hold temperature rises to the Paris climate deal's target of 2°C.

Research on deaths due to climate change usually focuses on older people who might be at a higher risk of heart and lung problems. Many older people were among the estimated [35,000 people who died in the 2003 Europe heatwave](#). But a team led by Robbie Parks at Imperial College London has found one way in which rising temperatures will increase death rates among younger people.

The researchers examined government figures on the 6 million people who died after an injury between 1980 and 2017 in the US, excluding Hawaii and Alaska.

Combining the data with monthly temperature spikes above the long-term average over the period, they found that in a future year that is anomalously hot by 1.5°C – the [Paris accord's toughest target](#) – there will be 1601 extra deaths from injuries each year. If temperatures rise by the worst-case Paris goal of 2°C, the number climbs to 2135.

## Car crashes

“Climate change as a health issue goes beyond the physical and goes to the behavioural and the mental,” says Parks, who says the projected increase in deaths isn’t insignificant.

Notably, the extra deaths would fall overwhelmingly – 84 per cent – on men, with most of them aged between 15 and 64. The biggest number of extra deaths would be related to transport, such as car crashes, followed by suicide. There will also be a smaller rise in deaths from drowning.

The study doesn’t show why younger men will be affected more, but it may be down to more reckless behaviour causing unintentional deaths such as drowning, says Parks.

The total number of extra deaths is relatively small: 2135 deaths equates to 1 per cent of all injury-related deaths in the US. But Parks says that the way the deaths fall on otherwise young and healthy men would have knock-on effects, including on the economy.

“It is concerning that most of these injury-related deaths are expected to occur among young adults,” says Francesca Dominici at Harvard University. Moreover, she expects there may be an even higher death toll when other factors are considered, such as accidental deaths linked to wildfires during heatwaves.

The risk of more deaths can be reduced by cutting carbon emissions and limiting future warming, and by public health efforts, such as targeting young men with campaigns about the risks of drowning, says Parks.

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