

# Flood risk for low-income housing in U.S. could triple by 2050

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An aerial view of damage from Superstorm Sandy in New York City in 2012.  
Credit: [Governor Andrew Cuomo/Flickr](#)

The number of affordable housing units in the United States at risk of flooding could triple over the next three decades due to climate change,

to nearly 25,000 by 2050, according to a new study from the research group Climate Central. Low-income residents in New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey are particularly vulnerable, with each state containing thousands of affordable housing units at risk of chronic coastal flooding in the coming decades.

Researchers found that 7,668 affordable housing units currently flood in a given year. By 2050, as sea levels rise and [coastal storms](#) intensify, this number is expected to jump to 24,519. Part of the problem is that low-income housing across the U.S. has long been disproportionately placed in flood zones. According to Climate Central, "by 2050, virtually every coastal state is expected to have at least some affordable housing exposed to more than one 'coastal flood risk event' per year, on average—up from about half of coastal states in the year 2000." In New York City, 4,774 units could flood every year; in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 3,167; and in Boston, Massachusetts, 3,042. California and Florida were other hotspots of risk.

The study, published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, found that this tripling will occur even if nations manage to drastically reduce their emissions, due to heating already locked into the climate system.

Flooding in [low-income communities](#) can have lasting impacts. While wealthier homeowners have the resources to bounce back quickly after a natural disaster, many [low-income residents](#) have a harder time finding the funds to recover. Homes and cars damaged by floodwaters are not easily fixed or replaced, endangering residents' health and financial security.

"We don't turn our attention on these neighborhoods but many of them are already suffering significantly from these problems," Benjamin Strauss, chief executive and chief scientist of Climate Central, told The

Guardian. "Low-income people don't have the resources to respond or recover from these increasing floods. The impact upon their lives is far more severe than someone with a second home or a lot of disposable income."

**More information:** Maya K Buchanan et al. Sea level rise and coastal flooding threaten affordable housing, *Environmental Research Letters* (2020). DOI: [10.1088/1748-9326/abb266](https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/abb266)

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