

Climate change is fueling record-high heat, drought, wildfires in Western U.S.

July 15 2021



Credit: Pixabay

Western parts of the U.S. are feeling the effects of climate change this summer as areas suffer from record-high temperatures, drought condition, and wildfires. Adam Coates, an expert in forest fire ecology and management at Virginia Tech, says there are many intricacies of climate change that lead to these extreme weather patterns, including

how temperature and precipitation are being altered.

"The elevated temperatures seen in many locations today are also accompanied by a lack of adequate precipitation during the times when temperatures are elevated. When temperatures are elevated and precipitation is low, vegetation may dry," says Coates.

Coates says ingredients that fuel [wildfire](#) ignitions are heat, oxygen, and dry vegetation.

"Whether by way of lightning ignitions or the activities of humans—such as the failure to extinguish campfires or arson—fires often ignite under these conditions," says Coates. "As many [natural landscapes](#) have gone years without adequate management, fuel loads and structures are often primed for significant wildfire activity."

For communities and neighborhoods at risk from wildfires this season, Coates offers the following advice on how to protect your home.

"People can really abide by two rules. First, follow local ordinances and common sense—do not conduct outdoor burns when local conditions suggest wildfire risk is elevated. Go the extra mile to appropriately extinguish campfires and other open fires when burning is allowed."

"Second, promote and advocate for active wildland management. Fuels and other materials naturally accumulate in the absence of active forest and wildland management that may include forest harvesting, thinning, and invasive species management."

Coates says if you own a home, especially in a fire-prone area, ensure that your community is working to reduce the risk of wildfires by following the guidelines set forth by [FireWise](#).

Provided by Virginia Tech

Citation: Climate change is fueling record-high heat, drought, wildfires in Western U.S. (2021, July 15) retrieved 10 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-07-climate-fueling-record-high-drought-wildfires.html>

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