

# Roth: The high cost of climate volatility

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on February 5, 2018.

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## The high cost of climate volatility

Natural disasters cost the United States \$306 billion in 2017, matching a previous record set in 2011.

Hearing this, we Oklahomans can recall that last year's tornado season, which resulted in one death in our state, was comparatively tame, although that is hardly a term to describe a tornado season or a loss of life.

The costs from the 2017 figures are mostly property damage from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and damage from wildfires that plagued the West Coast. And the numbers of lives lost and injured continue to grow.

States all across the country suffered damage from all forms of severe weather, including wildfires, resulting smoke and ash, droughts, floods, unseasonable tornadoes, damaging hail, excessive rain, dangerous winds, record snowfalls, and severe thunderstorms. Sixteen devastating weather events, each with a price tag over \$1 billion, tested this country's resolve and took lives.

I listed Maria, but this storm warrants its own discussion. Damage estimates are just under \$100 billion for this hurricane that devastated Puerto Rico and other nearby islands. Some parts of Puerto Rico remain without power still and will be for eight months or more as efforts to rebuild the electric grid continue. If that doesn't make you want to put up solar panels or live free off the grid, I don't know what will.

But surely it will get better? No, say scientists, climate change will continue to cause worse weather. Every state is experiencing erratic and above-average temperatures, five of which set record temps last year, and in December, Alaska experienced temps that were more than 15 degrees above average.

That was 2017. Right away, 2018 added insult to injury in California, when land that was raw and barren from the recent historic wildfires was pummeled by mudslides destroying homes and lives. While we can quantify the damage to property, the harm caused to humans is, in some cases, quite literally immeasurable.

For instance, there are physical health hazards from wildfires that accompany the smoke and ash that blanketed not only

California, but also nearby Washington and Oregon. Even more difficult to measure are the psychological tolls that frightening weather events have on people. Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with that concept in Oklahoma.

If you are like me, you like the optimistic, fresh start a new year offers. So here is a productive tool you can use to offset some of this human activity that leads to this troubling news. Previously I've mentioned the EPA's Carbon Footprint Calculator. This is a great way to live consciously while actively doing what you can to reduce your daily greenhouse gas emissions.

As the price of climate change and erratic weather continues to rise in American lives and property, every individual effort helps.

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