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Stuck With The Bill: Local Governments Deluged With Rising Climate Damage Costs

Who's stuck with the bill for climate impacts? Too often, local governments.

Much of Columbus, Ohio, was without power for days this past June as the local electric utility struggled to manage simultaneous impacts of powerful storms and a heat wave. Many buildings lost air conditioning, and the city faced a potential public health crisis. Officials directed residents to several cooling centers, including a museum that was paid $60,000 per day to open its doors to the public.

According to Columbus City Council member Rob Dorans, this fee is just one of the many expenses added to the municipal books as rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns have strained the infrastructure in the Ohio capital. Since 2019, Columbus has spent more than $62 million on flood mitigation projects and $21 million on a flood tunnel designed to prevent stormwater runoff from overpowering the sewer system.

"The biggest variable that we're dealing with now when you talk about these sorts of infrastructure investments is being caused by a changing climate," Dorans said. "That is the driving force behind these investments."

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YALE CLIIMATE CONNECTIONS

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