

Study finds possible link between ER visits, change in climate

BY WILLIAM TONG
The Dallas Morning News

DALLAS
Across the country, at least a quarter of emergency room visits for heat-related illness may be attributable to human-caused climate change, researchers from Climate Central, a nonprofit group, estimate in a new study.

Published in the September issue of Climatic Change, a scientific journal, the researchers’ peer-reviewed analysis suggests climate change contributed to about 27% of heat-related ER visits in the U.S. during warm seasons from 2018 through 2025.

Heat-related illness is on the rise across the United States. Yale School of Public Health researchers found that heat-related deaths increased by more than 50% between 2000 and 2020.

“Our healthcare system is pretty strained, when we think of emergency medicine in particular,” said Kristina Dahl, vice president for science at Climate Central. “This data is giving us a baseline that we know we’d be building on if we continue warming our planet.”

Climate change’s impact on ER visits varies by region, Dahl’s team found. In the Southern Plains area containing Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana and New Mexico, the researchers estimated human-caused climate change contributed about 25% to the rate of heat-related ER visits.

While climate change generally contributed to a bigger share of the rate in regions with milder summers, the South still had a higher absolute rate due to human-caused climate change, researchers wrote. They estimated about 57 of every 100,000 ER visits in the region containing Texas were for climate change-contributed heat illnesses. On average, about 225 of every 100,000 ER visits in the region were heat-related.

Dahl said climate change’s contribution to heat-related illness will likely grow without major human actions to reverse course.

To calculate their results, Climate Central scientists estimated what temperatures might have looked like in a world without human-caused climate change. They used those temperatures to predict rates of ER visits for heat-related illness in the modeled world, and used the difference from actual visit rates as an indicator of climate change’s contributions. Dahl said this method is based on two decades of environmental science, and that there are well-established relationships between temperature and hospital visits for heat-related illness.

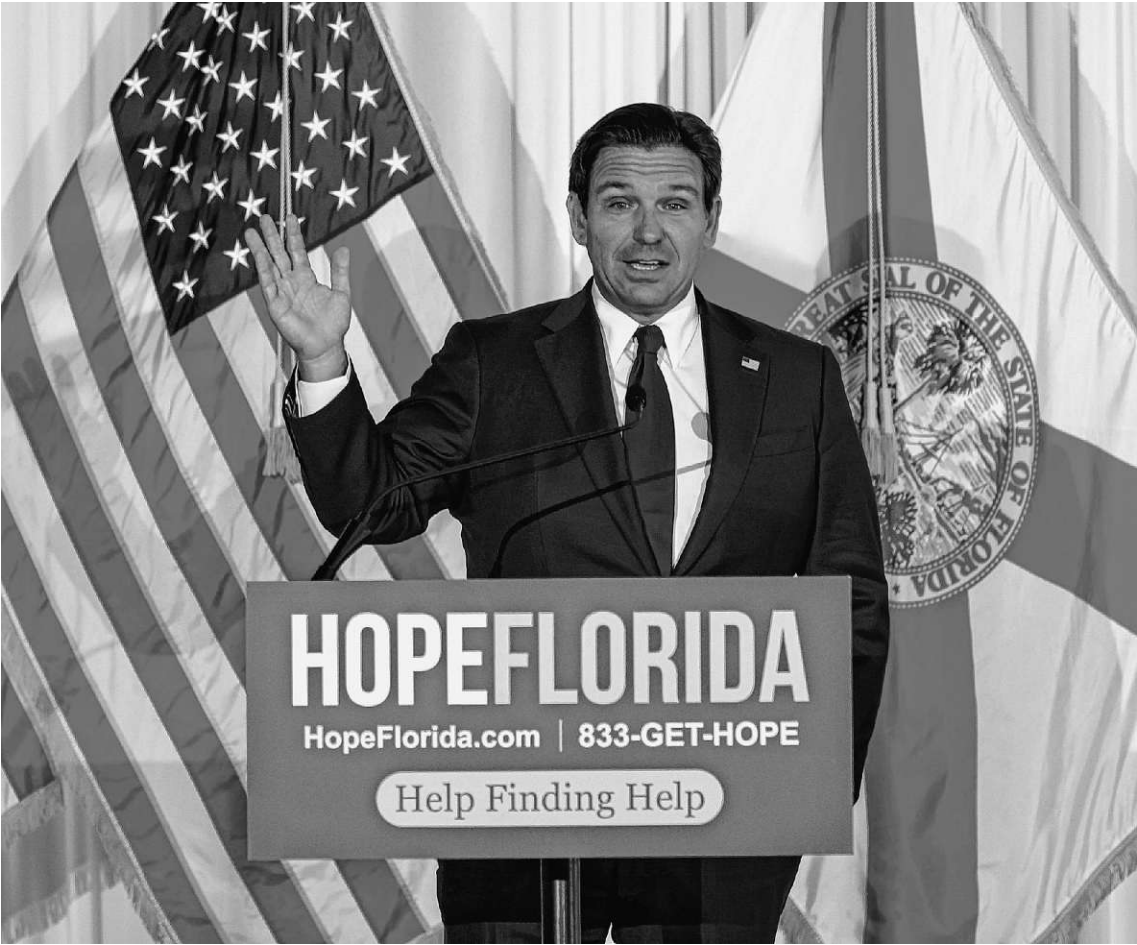
Still, the study’s methodology provides only a rough approximation of climate change’s impact on ER visits, said University of North Texas health professor Kai Zhang. His research group studies the impact of climate change on public health.

Humidity and weather variations within the study regions also play a role in ER visit rate estimates, Zhang said. And, because many hospital visits in which excessive heat played a role might be recorded with an alternative main complaint such as cardiovascular disease, official figures on heat-related ER visits are likely undercounts.

It’s hard to retroactively determine which specific deaths resulted from human-made climate change, but the broad shifts in weather that we are experiencing will most likely exacerbate not just heat-related, but other illnesses in the U.S., Zhang said.

“As a result of changing climate, we will see more and more extreme weather events,” Zhang said. “Extreme heat, extreme cold, hurricanes, flooding.”

Dahl hopes her team’s research can help public health systems adapt to changing climate.



JEFFEREE WOO Tampa Bay Times/TNS

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks about Hope Florida during a news conference in 2025.

Group still pushing for court records for Hope Florida

BY JEFFREY SCHWEERS, ORLANDO SENTINEL
The Tribune Content Agency

TALLAHASSEE, FLA.

Open government advocates spent the last six months pushing a Leon County circuit court for records related to the Hope Florida grand jury, convinced the state is covering up one of the biggest scandals in its history - the diversion of \$10 million in Medicaid settlement funds to Republican political activities.

They are still pushing, despite the fact that the grand jury’s completed report was leaked to CBS News Miami and then reported on by the station and multiple other news organizations in August. The report placed high-ranking members of the DeSantis administration - including Attorney General James Uthmeier and Jason Weida, the governor’s chief of staff - at the heart of a “sophisticated scheme”

to misappropriate taxpayer funds to fight a citizen-led initiative to legalize marijuana in 2024.

And while the report is now public, everything else about the grand jury’s proceedings, including any legal efforts by state officials to keep the report secret, is wrongly hidden in a “black box,” they say. Despite many legal filings - and the likelihood that a judge issued written orders about the report - court officials say they have no records to release.

There is no case number or docket sheet, the document that typically lists every legal filing in a case, so there is no public access to the fight newspaper attorneys and Florida Center for Government Accountability have been waging.

“We are staring at a black box and can’t see anything,” said Michael Barfield, executive director of the Florida Center for Government Accountability, which has been trying since February to

access the court records.

“We’re entitled to look into the black box and see what is in there,” he said days after filing the organization’s third motion related to the case on Sept. 10. “We’re going to press on this as far as necessary.”

When the Orlando Sentinel asked the Leon County Clerk of Courts for records related to the grand jury, it was told that the court could “neither confirm nor deny” that such records existed. The government accountability group, however, when requested provided its motions and related judicial orders to the newspaper.

Grand jury proceedings are kept confidential to allow people to testify freely without worrying about consequences and so that the subjects of an investigation are not unfairly tainted before the jury can decide whether to file charges against them.

The Hope Florida grand jury, despite castigating state officials

for failing to conduct “due diligence,” said it couldn’t find enough evidence to recommend criminal charges, mainly because it could not pinpoint who was to blame since no one would “take responsibility” for key decisions.

Barfield’s group acknowledges that “Florida law recognizes the confidentiality of grand jury proceedings and materials” but argues “that confidentiality is not self-executing as to the entire court file, progress docket, or related judicial orders.”

Since March, the organization has filed three motions with Judge J. Lee Marsh, the circuit court judge assigned to the grand jury, seeking to preserve records that would allow the public to know what went on behind closed doors and to discover what efforts, if any, Gov. Ron DeSantis and Uthmeier have taken to make sure the grand jury report and its associated records stay secret.

But at this point, Barfield said his group doesn’t know whether Marsh is done with the case, has issued an order sealing all the records or when to exercise its right to appeal.

“We want to know why they are fighting so furiously to keep this hidden,” Barfield said.

Judges have a tricky balancing act when it comes to deciding what parts of a grand jury investigation to make public and what records to keep confidential, said Bob Jarvis, a law professor at Nova Southeastern University.

“We want our courts to be transparent, and we start from the preposition that everything should be open to examine,” Jarvis said.

And there is a strong argument in this case for making at least some documents public, Jarvis said.

The report has already been leaked, showing public officials funneling millions of dollars meant to provide healthcare to the poor through First Lady Casey DeSantis’ pet charity to dark money political committees run by Uthmeier, the governor’s chief of staff at the time.

“So there is a great public interest and reason for the public to be concerned,” Jarvis said. “And It appears many public officials didn’t do their job in vetting this deal.”

DeSantis officials have denied wrongdoing, and the governor said the only crime committed was the leaking of the grand jury report. He called the investigation and allegations of wrongdoing a “hoax.”

The grand jury, however, said it could “plainly see” that taxpayer money was “misused” and said Uthmeier was in a “position of authority” over other DeSantis staff at the heart of the scheme.

St. Marys Glacier melted away. Will iconic snowfield ever return?

BY NOELLE PHILLIPS
The Denver Post

DENVER

St. Mary’s Glacier is gone. And it may never return to its glory days as an iconic snowfield above 10,000 feet in Clear Creek County, where it drew year-round skiers.

The remaining bits of snow and ice melted away last week, leaving hikers, skiers and tourism officials mourning the loss of one of the state’s most accessible and beloved glaciers, even if it’s technically not a glacier.

Colorado’s ongoing drought and record-hot summer, which scientists attribute to global warming, caused the snowfield to completely vanish for the first time in at least 100 years.

“St. Mary’s is a bit of the culture of Colorado,” said Dan McGrath, a Colorado State University associate professor of geosciences, who specializes in glaciers. “People ski and go see snow that persists through the summer. It is that loss that is the impact of this event. Glaciers are a bit of our identity.”

St. Mary’s is a 90-minute drive from Denver. It is accessible for most people because the trail is not too long or too steep, making it a destination for those who do not want to climb in extreme conditions. Year-round skiers trek to the site to bag some runs in August

and September to keep their consecutive-month streaks alive.

Despite its name, St. Mary’s is a “perennial snowfield” rather than an actual glacier, McGrath said. That does not make its disappearance any less significant, he said.

This winter’s record-low snowpack and 2026’s hottest average summer temperatures devastated it, and those conditions are also shrinking the state’s actual glaciers, including the Arapaho Glacier in the Indian Peaks Wilderness in Boulder County and the Andrews Glacier in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Weather patterns that dump a lot of snow and bring cooler summer temperatures could make conditions favorable again for year-round snow in the coming years at St. Mary’s. But scientists do not expect snow and cooler temperatures to be consistent enough to see the return of the thick, white snowfield where people could have snowball fights during the summer.

“This is a significant event, that it completely melted out,” McGrath said. “It would take multiple years of above-average snow to survive the summer and rebuild itself.”

Outdoor enthusiasts who regularly visit St. Mary’s began reporting its decline as early as July, but the snowfield’s complete disappearance went viral Thursday when Jonathan Inghram of Lakewood posted

pictures on Seth’s Weather Group, a Facebook page devoted to weather with more than 80,000 members.

“It was late July when it dawned on me this thing might melt out completely by Labor Day or mid-September,” Inghram said Friday. “I was really hoping it would hang on to that first snow next month.”

McGrath flew over St. Mary’s for an aerial survey on Sept. 9. He also viewed the Andrews and Arapaho glaciers. All were contracting, he said.

The Andrews Glacier lost 11 feet in the past year, according to McGrath’s measurements.

“It’s very much part of a larger trend here in Colorado but also in the western United States, Canada and globally that glaciers are thinning and re-treating,” McGrath said.

The World Meteorological Organization, which monitors worldwide climate and weather patterns, reports that glaciers lost an estimated average mass of 273 billion tons per year between 2000 and 2023, which is the most recent data available. The lost mass is equivalent to 0.75 millimeters per year of global sea-level rise.

In places such as the Andes Mountains in South America and the Himalayas in Asia, glaciers are a source of drinking water and sustain agriculture and other industries. In Colorado, they are not relied upon as a critical water

source, but they support the overall ecosystem by feeding streams. Insects, fish and plants need the water, McGrath said.

Colorado’s glaciers are not just formed by snowfall but also rely on wind and avalanches to fill shaded basins with additional snow, said Matt Siegfried, an associate professor at the Colorado School of Mines who teaches a class on the polar cryosphere. He described them as “quirky” when compared to other glaciers.

The state’s glaciers had shown growth between the 1950s and 2000, he said. But that changed about 15 years ago.

“These things have been shrinking for the past decade or two for a variety of reasons, and this was the last gasp,” Siegfried said.

Scientists are reluctant to pin blame for a single event on climate change, but Siegfried and McGrath agreed St. Mary’s disappearance is an indicator of a changing climate in Colorado.

“Climate is warming in Colorado,” Siegfried said. “That’s not controversial. The data shows that. Warmer temperatures melt glaciers.”

The warming is caused by greenhouse gas emissions such as carbon dioxide and volatile organic compounds, which mix in the atmosphere on hot days to form a blanket that traps heat closer to the Earth. The heat raises temperatures across the globe, causing more extreme weather such as heat waves, hailstorms and hurricanes.

The only way to slow the melting of glaciers is to change public policy and behavior to reduce carbon emissions, the scientists said.