

A Timeline of Three Crises:



TOTAL CASES | THE FIRST 90 DAYS

JAN 26
2,023

FEB 3
17,372

FEB 17
71,333

MAR 9
111,004

MAR 23
356,217

ILLUME

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How COVID-19 Raised the Stakes for Racial and Climate Justice



As an industry and a country, we are living through the convergence of three inextricable crises: a global pandemic, racial injustice, and climate change.

The global pandemic resulted in an unprecedented loss of life and disruptions across every sector of the American economy. As the economy eroded, so too did household incomes. Mounting energy bills led to disconnection moratoria by public utility commissions.¹ As for jobs, the energy industry, which once boasted nearly 3.4 million jobs before the pandemic,² lost an unprecedented 600,000 jobs by June 2020.³

More importantly, the pandemic laid bare underlying inequities disproportionately affecting Black and disadvantaged communities across the country.⁴ The death of George Floyd was the tipping point. The phrase, “I can’t breathe” took on new meaning and urgency as a rallying cry for both social and environmental justice.⁵ Equally disruptive was the inescapable context of climate change during the pandemic. People escaping urban heat effects had to now consider social distancing when looking for cool indoor spaces,⁶ while concerns about the overlap between wildfire smoke and COVID-19 added another layer of consideration for public health departments issuing health advisories.⁷

In a year marked by innumerable challenges, this is the journey of how ILLUME leaned in to 2020 and advised our industry through the uncertainty of a global pandemic while never losing sight of the voices of those most impacted.

MAR 30
743,126

A Global Pandemic



March 24, 2020

Times Square, New York during the first lockdown.



April 16, 2020

In Texas, a line of cars at a COVID-19 drive-through testing center.

COVID-19 CASES
WORLDWIDE

393

82,116

256,173

1,120,502

12/31/19

China identifies dozens of cases of a new virus (later called COVID-19).

1/21/20

The first case confirmed in the United States in Washington State.

2/27/20

The Dow Jones officially enters correction territory after plunging 700 points.

3/20/20

Public Utility Commissions begin suspending utility shutoffs to households due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4/4/20

World Health Organization reports over 1 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide.

1/11/20

China reports the first death from COVID-19.

2/11/20

China's COVID-19 death toll surpasses 1,000 people.

2/29/20

The US CDC reports the first US death from COVID-19 in Washington State.

3/23/20

FERC and NERC lessen compliance regulations as COVID-19 worsens.

59

43,109

85,240

356,682

“

One of the challenges now especially around COVID-19 . . . is that about 15,000 Navajo homes don't have electricity. If we think about the guidance that has been given around reducing virus spread of COVID, it has been around hand washing and that becomes even more impossible if you don't have running water.”⁸

Dr. Len Necefer,
Assistant Professor,
University of Arizona



August 16, 2020

Empty school hallways juxtapose images of packed bars and restaurants across the country. 2020 is dubbed ‘The Lost Year’ for America’s children.

From the webinar
Tribal Energy Resilience



June 13, 2020

Healthcare workers, first responders, and frontline workers exemplify steady courage in the face of unpredictability.

“

The simple reality is that in March we laid off 175 employees and at that point there was no choice....The uncertainty of the situation was probably most difficult for us.”¹⁰

Todd Hanley,
Proprietor, Hotel Congress and Maynards
Market & Kitchen
Tucson, AZ

From the webinar
Impacts of COVID-19 on Small Business

5,288,220

5/24/20

US COVID-19 deaths exceed 100,000. The New York Times prints names of 1,000 dead Americans on its front page.

34,416,232

10/2/20

President Donald Trump is diagnosed with COVID-19 and undergoes several days of treatment at Walter Reed Medical Center.

54,124,170

11/15/20

Biotechnology company, Moderna demonstrates 95% effectiveness in COVID-19 vaccine trials.

57,030,427

11/20/20

Drug maker Pfizer asks regulators to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine after demonstrating a 95% effectiveness rate.

59,307,493

11/24/20

COVID-19 shows no signs of slowing as more than 2,100 deaths are reported in a single day.

8/7/20

Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota draws nearly 460,000 people despite concerns of a superspreader event.

11/3/20

Americans head to the polls on Election Day with more than 100 million people voting early.

11/19/20

US death toll from COVID-19 surpasses 250,000 with countless infection clusters appearing before the Thanksgiving holiday.

11/21/20

Despite a COVID-19 spike, travelers were undeterred as more than 1 million people passed through the country's airports.

19,145,339

47,140,765

56,392,321

57,710,848

“

We as a country, have built lots of house of cards solutions....Something like the pandemic comes in and knocks out a bunch of cards and suddenly we're all scrambling.”⁹

Lisa LeBeau Obear,
Managing Director, ILLUME Advising

From the podcast
HVAC Systems, Indoor Air Quality,
and COVID-19

November 3, 2020

A line of voters waiting to cast their vote on Election Day.





May 25, 2020

George Floyd is killed in police custody in Minneapolis, MN resulting in unprecedented calls for racial justice and police reform.



June, 2020

A statue of Christopher Columbus is toppled in Minnesota as the country's attention turns to flags, statues, and other vestiges of America's racist past.

3/13/20

Breonna Taylor is killed during a nighttime raid while sleeping in her bed in Louisville, Kentucky.

5/8/20

Ahmaud Arbery is shot and killed while jogging in Brunswick, Georgia.

5/25/20

In New York's Central Park, a white woman calls police alleging a Black bird-watcher threatened to assault her after being asked to leash her dog.

6/3/20

Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, is arrested and charged with second degree murder in the George Floyd incident.

6/11/20

Louisville Metro Council passes Breonna's Law, outlawing "no-knock" warrants and requiring body cameras to be turned on before and after every search.

6/25/20

Colorado Governor signs an executive order to investigate the death of Elijah McClain, fatally shot by police in August 2019.

June 2020

Protests, marches and peaceful demonstrations draw hundreds of thousands in the US and across the globe.



“

I think that in a lot of ways the murder of George Floyd has been that moment of reckoning for organizations working on energy and climate....The hard truth is that the energy and climate space has often struggled with racial diversity and has often overlooked, or at worst, excluded under-resourced communities and communities of color.”¹¹

Ben Passer,

Director of Energy Access and Equity,
Fresh Energy

From the webinar

Black Voices in Climate: Emerging Leadership, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Engagement

Racial Injustice

“

As utilities we try to understand this key role that we play in quality of life. One of the things that we found out through the ILLUME research through ethnography studies and programs . . . people of color they have the same relationship with their home as other folks but they were not given the opportunity to improve that relationship and make that house into a home.”¹²

Eric Arnold,
Residential Energy Efficiency Program
Implementation Manager, Georgia Power

From the webinar
Service Equity: Legislation and Program
Offerings Driven by Social Justice



June, 2020

The Black Lives Matter movement picks up momentum across cities, communities, board rooms, and even sports teams.

6/30/20

Mississippi signs a bill to change its state flag, removing the Confederate flag symbol after more than a century.

7/3/20

The Washington Redskins NFL team announces they will change their name after a long history of using Native American imagery as part of its brand identity.

8/15/20

The “Defend Stone Mountain” protest takes place with individuals protecting Confederate monuments on Stone Mountain in Georgia, attracting violence and protests.

8/23/20

Jacob Blake is shot several times in the back by a police officer in Wisconsin.

10/7/20

Derek Chauvin, the man who killed George Floyd, is released from police custody on bail. This spurs protests throughout Minneapolis and the rest of the country.



June, 2020

The Washington, DC mayor renames the section of 16th St NW between H and K, Black Lives Matter Plaza.

“

You’re coming to work and you’re thinking that could have been my brother, that could have been my nephew, that could have been my son. And so the impact of that weighs on you. And coming to work and being able to express that in a safe and trusting environment speaks volumes.”¹³

Pamela Fann,
Director of Membership & Diversity
Integration, SEEA

From the webinar
Fostering Safe Spaces that Enable Change in
the Energy Industry



April, 2020

The pandemic left sections of Los Angeles empty of people and traffic, spurring conversations about the real possibility of clean air.

August 11, 2020

The city of San Francisco under the canopy of an orange sky as a result of nearby wildfires.



6/7/20

Tropical Storm Cristobal makes landfall over Louisiana, becoming the second-earliest tropical cyclone to reach the state.

7/31/20

A lightning strike near Grand Junction, Colorado, starts the Pine Gulch Fire and becomes the largest wildfire on record for the state.

8/4/20

Hurricane Isaias makes landfall in North Carolina, causing damages of \$4.5 billion and outages felt as far as New York City.

8/10/20

A derecho travels 700 miles from Iowa to Ohio with winds over 100 mph.

8/16/20

The Beachie Creek, Lionshead, and P-515 wildfires combined into the Santiam Fire, putting 10% of Oregon's population under evacuation order.

8/17/20

The Lake Napa Unit Lightning Complex fire becomes the third largest fire on record in California, burning 363,220 acres.

“

Can we flatten this curve too? There are some interesting parallels in that both (Climate Crisis and COVID-19) are taking . . . dramatic action to address effectively an invisible existential threat. So, we've learned from COVID-19 the actions we need to take to address climate change.”¹⁴

Lucas Johnson,
Western Regional Manager,
475 High Performance Supply

From the webinar
Virtual Focus Group: Energy Contractor Networks



August, 2020

The US recorded its warmest August temperature ever of 130°F in Death Valley, California.

Climate Change

“

The question is when this is all over, are we going back to the way things were? . . . The bigger question, 'Will there be structural changes to the economy which will then improve air quality and address climate change?'"¹⁵

Dr. Edward Vine,
Affiliate, Lawrence Berkeley
National Laboratory

From the webinar
Climate and Energy Action in a Public Health Crisis



November, 2020

The National Flood Insurance Program faces over \$20 billion of debt as the 2020 hurricane season delivers catastrophic losses.

8/17/20

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior authorizes oil and gas leasing on 1.56 million acres of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's Coastal Plain.

8/18/20

The Santa Clara Unit Lightning Complex fire becomes the second largest fire on record in California, burning 396,624 acres over 44 days.

8/27/20

Hurricane Laura makes landfall in Louisiana, the strongest hurricane to hit Louisiana since 1856, causing \$14 billion in damage.

9/8/20

The Northern Plains experience an early freeze causing an abrupt end to the growing season.

9/15/20

Hurricane Sally makes landfall in Alabama. 2020 marks the fourth consecutive year the US is hit by a slow-moving tropical cyclone.



November, 2020

Climate migration hits the US as record numbers of Californians leave the state, citing economic factors and the threat of wildfires.

“

*Environmental justice advocates are not typically offered a seat at these tables where these decisions and policies are being made. I mean, you literally have to fight to be invited. And so, while I think it's also super important that environmental justice advocates and other advocates try and get to these tables, it's also important for us to create our own tables."*¹⁶

Dr. Jalonnie White-Newsome,
Senior Program Officer,
The Kresge Foundation

From the webinar
Environmental Racism and Health Disparities