

## How Rhode Island Takes a Punch

Rhode Island is a boxer holding his hands low and fighting for breath. It has among the top five highest unemployment rates in the country; a city that declared bankruptcy; and a budget situation you wouldn't wish on your enemy.

Here's a quick glance at some of the state's problems, a couple of which, ironically, are fairly valid predictors of education levels, in a scenario where a well-informed and knowledgeable citizenry is going to be a key factor in how well climate change is weathered, if you will:

- Over 12 percent of RI's population is below the poverty level (US Census, 2007-2011 average)
- 21 percent of RI's population over the age of five speaks a language other than English at home ([US Census Quick Facts RI](#))
- Big McMansion development on the coast creates storm debris for mobile homes and modest cottages more inland (e.g., the Ocean Mist area in Matunuck on RI's south shore) which will be wiped out and not have money to rebuild.

In the RI State Hazard Mitigation Plan, social vulnerability includes "(T)he population density, as well as tract-wide percentages on the percent of: non-whites; families below the poverty line; elderly populations; those with no high schooling; disabled adults; people on public assistance; those with no vehicles; renters, and percentage of non-English speakers." These categories correspond to social groups tracked by the U.S. Census.

So let us please not suppose that the (public perception) ivory tower scientists and the well-to-do are raising climate change issues because they will be the ones to suffer its consequences. Self-interest is not the motivator. The IPCC Report, created by over 1,000 scientists, pointed out the injustice of impacts that global warming will have on the poorest among us. But these impacts will "trickle up" and cost all of us. So we better lace up our gloves and put in our mouthguards. Global warming is going to hit Rhode Island, the U.S. and the world with a basic, hard body punch that will be felt from the recipient's teeth to his toes.



Rhode Island's South County coast felt the full impact of Superstorm Sandy

*Photo Credit: Ted Sorlien*