

Terry Myers Letter to the Editor. *The Washington Post*, 19 May 2026

Is the U.S. prepared for extreme summer weather?

The May 13 news article "[A super El Niño wiped out millions in 1877. Are we better prepared now?](#)," gave fair warning that the United States could be facing something approximating "the worst environmental disaster to ever befall humanity." But it concluded that "the world is now much more prepared to deal with the consequences."

The world may be more knowledgeable thanks to major advances in the science of tracking and predicting weather, but the United States isn't as prepared today as it was before [February 2025, when Elon Musk bragged](#) on X that "we spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper."

I was a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Agency for International Development for 35 years, and saw the United States become the world's largest and most capable provider of disaster assistance. But with the destruction of USAID last year, the U.S. hamstrung its ability to respond to global emergencies: Secretary of State Marco Rubio canceled [83 percent](#) of USAID's programs, ended grants and contracts, and fired most of USAID's 10,000 employees. The U.S. also cut its contributions to U.N. organizations, forcing dramatic staff reductions across humanitarian operations worldwide.

So while more may be known today than in 1877, the U.S. has, in the past year, crippled its ability to act on that knowledge. As a result, millions of people around the world are at risk. That is a tragedy of our own making.

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