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IPCC climate change report: Britain should 'get used' to more flooding and storms

Daily Telegraph by Danielle Demetriou 31.03.14

Britain should brace itself for a rise in floods, heatwaves and coastal storms, a UK academic involved in the most comprehensive study to date into the impact of global warming warned on Monday.

The UK is likely to face a growing number of extreme weather scenarios as a result of global warming, according to Neil Adger, a geography professor at Exeter University and an author of the latest report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Such patterns will also fuel a surge in British "climate change refugees", including families forced out of their homes due to flooding, as well as increasing fatalities due to extreme heatwaves.

"The impacts of climate change are already here and they're being felt everywhere in the world," he told The Telegraph.

"There's no country, no region that's actually immune from climate change.

These impacts have already been felt and they're going to be consequential going into the future. All these messages apply to the UK."

Professor Adger's comments were made as the UK emerged from its wettest winter on record, resulting in 7,000 homes across the country flooded, 11 deaths and a cost to small businesses of around £830 million. He was speaking in Yokohama, Japan, where the comprehensive IPCC Working Group II report examining the global impact of global warming was published on Monday, compiled by more than 300 authors from 70 different countries.

"The records already show that there's been an increase in precipitation," said Professor Adger. "Rainfall is coming in shorter periods so we have an increase in rainfall intensity. That's what leads to increased risk of flooding."

Referring to a string of challenges likely to impact the UK - including flooding, water shortages and heatwaves - he added: "We're going to have to get used to these things. These risks are not insignificant." In addition to vulnerable coastal and low-lying areas, cities across the UK were also flagged up as being at particular risk, with heatwaves and related deaths among the elderly becoming a growing issue.

"The biggest single movement of people in the world is still into cities, particularly urbanised cities," he said. "These cities are growing - and that's where the crucible of impacts is going to be felt."

He added: "The 2013 summer heatwave in the UK led to excess deaths of at least 2,000 people in the southeast of England, mainly in London. Just from one single event.

"We're going to have to deal with more heatwaves, as global mean temperatures rise."

Urging the British government to "read the report", he also highlighted how the risks associated with climate change needed to be incorporated into policies across the spectrum to halt the realisation of global warming's worst case scenarios.

"The immediate steps the government needs to take are to factor risk into all their policies - in terms of environmental and flooding, as well as coastal planning, agriculture and public health planning."

The latest IPCC report, the first update in seven years, confirms that climate scientists appear more certain than ever before that human behaviour is the key culprit for global warming.

Declaring the warming trend "unequivocal", it highlights how temperatures could rise as much as 4.8C by the end of the century - with a minimum increase of around 0.3C if governments succeed in sharply cutting greenhouse emission rates.

"One thing that's really clear is that we're not prepared for the climatic issues we face now," Chris Field, a global ecology director at the Carnegie Institution in Washington and co-chair of the report, told the Telegraph "But it also is clear that when you look at the literature on climate change adaptation, that investing in improved adaptation and decreasing vulnerability to the risk we face now, is a very good starting point for dealing with the risks we will face in the future."

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