

Most US organizations not adapting to climate change

December 2 2008

Organizations in the United States that are at the highest risk of sustaining damage from climate change are not adapting enough to the dangers posed by rising temperatures, according to a Yale report.

"Despite a half century of climate change that has already significantly affected temperature and precipitation patterns and has already had widespread ecological and hydrological impacts, and despite a near certainty that the United States will experience at least as much climate change in the coming decades just as a result of current atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, little adaptation has occurred," says Robert Repetto, author of "The Climate Crisis and the Adaptation Myth" and a senior fellow of the United Nations Foundation.

Repetto says that private- and public-sector organizations face significant obstacles to adaptation because of uncertainties over the occurrence of climate change at the regional and local levels, over the future frequency of extreme weather events, and over the ecological, economic and other impacts of climate change.

In addition, organizations lack relevant data for planning and forecasting, and the data that are available are typically outdated and unrepresentative of future conditions. Other institutional barriers to adaptation are overcoming or revising codes, rules and regulations that impede change; the lack of clear directions and mandates to take action; political or ideological resistance to the need for responsiveness to climate change; the preoccupation with near-term challenges and

priorities and the lingering perception that climate change is a concern only for sometime in the future; and the inertia created by a business-as-usual assumption that future conditions will be like those of the past.

"Those organizations in the public and private sectors that are most at risk, that are making long-term investments and commitments and that have the planning, forecasting and institutional capacity to adapt, have not yet done so," says Repetto, who until recently was a professor in the practice of economics and sustainable development at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. "There have been very few changes in forecasts, plans, investment decisions, budgets or staffing patterns in response to climate risks."

The report cites:

-- New York City's 40-year-old building codes that require structures to withstand only 110 mph winds, when climate change is causing more intense hurricanes that could bring speeds of up to 135 mph, and its flood maps that are based on historical data and not on climate change modeling data. Increases in sea levels and surges associated with severe storms would likely inundate Kennedy Airport and lower Manhattan, including the subway entrances and tunnels into Manhattan.

-- Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas, where water supply is critical and climate change is not factored into state agencies' current water management plans.

-- A 2007 GAO report that land and resource managers for the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service have ignored a directive by the Interior Department to consider climate change in their management plans.

-- Federal planning guidelines that states and municipalities must follow

to receive funding for transportation investments that do not require consideration of climate change in the design and siting of highways and rail lines.

-- Municipal public health agencies in Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia, among others, that have not factored climate change into plans for confronting public health risks, despite the belief that climate change will increase the incidence and severity of vector-borne diseases and respiratory illnesses.

"To say that the United States has the technological, economic and human capacity to adapt to climate change does not imply that the United States will adapt," said Repetto. "Without national leadership and concerted efforts to remove these barriers and obstacles, adaptation to climate change is likely to continue to lag."

Source: Yale University

Citation: Most US organizations not adapting to climate change (2008, December 2) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-12-climate.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.