

Climate change hits home

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Direct experience of extreme weather events increases concern about climate change and willingness to engage in energy-saving behaviour, according to a new research paper published in the first edition of the journal *Nature Climate Change* this week.

In particular, members of the British public are more prepared to take personal action and reduce their [energy use](#) when they perceive their [local area](#) has a greater vulnerability to flooding, according to the research by Cardiff and Nottingham universities.

Although no single flooding event can be attributed to [climate change](#), Britain has experienced a series of major [flood](#) events over the past decade, something which is expected to increase in years to come as a result of climate change.

Psychologist Dr Alexa Spence, now at the University of Nottingham, said: "We know that many people tend to see climate change as distant, affecting other people and places. However experiences of [extreme weather events](#) like flooding have the potential to change the way people view climate change, by making it more real and tangible, and ultimately resulting in greater intentions to act in sustainable ways."

The research team and Ipsos-MORI surveyed 1,822 members of the British public to test whether personal experience of flooding had affected perceptions about climate change. They also looked at whether those perceptions would affect respondents' intentions regarding energy use. The study revealed that people who reported flooding experiences

had significantly different perceptions of climate change, compared to those who had not experienced flooding. These perceptions were, in turn related to a greater preparedness to save energy. In particular:

- Those who reported flooding in their local area were more likely to be concerned about climate change, to perceive a greater local vulnerability to its impacts, and also felt more able to have an impact (perceived instrumentality) over the issue.
- Flooding experiences were also linked to lower levels of uncertainty regarding the existence of climate change
- Perceived instrumentality, concern, and perceived local vulnerability were found to mediate the relationship between flooding experience and preparedness to reduce energy use.

Professor Nick Pidgeon, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, who led the research team added: "This important study provides the first solid evidence for something which has been suspected for some time – that people's local experience of climate related events such as flooding will promote higher awareness of the issue. As a result it suggests new ways for engaging people with this most important and pressing of environmental issues."

More information: Spence A., Poortinga, W., Butler, C., and Pidgeon, N.F. (2011) Perceptions of climate change and willingness to act sustainably influenced by flood experiences. *Nature Climate Change* [dx.doi.org/10.1038/NCLIMATE1059](https://doi.org/10.1038/NCLIMATE1059)

Provided by Cardiff University

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