

# Obama unleashing power of data on climate change (Update)

March 19 2014, by Seth Borenstein

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The Obama administration hopes to fight global warming with the geeky power of numbers, maps and even gaming-type simulations.

Officials figure the more you know about climate change the more likely you will do something.

"People need to understand what is happening and what is likely to happen," White House science adviser John Holdren told reporters.

The White House on Wednesday announced an initiative to provide private companies and local governments better access to already public climate data. The idea is that with that localized data they can help the public understand the risks they face, especially in coastal areas where flooding is a big issue.

The government also is working with several high-tech companies, such as Google, Microsoft and Intel, to come up with tools to make communities more resilient in dealing with weather extremes, such as flooding, heat waves and drought. They include computer simulations for people to use and see what would happen with rising seas and other warming scenarios. Also, companies will hold brainstorming sessions with computer programmers aimed at designing new apps on disaster risk.

For example Esri, a company that does geographic information systems, used federal data to show what would happen to New York

neighborhoods if sea level rises by 3 feet—which scientists say is likely by the end of the century. It would displace 780,000 people, Esri chief executive Jack Dangermond said.

NASA and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration will try get people to create simulations to understand flooding risks in an upcoming coastal flooding challenge. One effort would include putting sensors on Philadelphia city buses to collect data to track the effect of climate change.

In its second term, the administration has made more of an effort to connect global warming to its effect on people, especially extreme weather and disasters.

"The more people that have information, the harder it is for a few to block action" on climate change, Holdren said in reference to a 2012 North Carolina proposal that would ignore sea level rise from global warming in flood maps.

Social science literature shows that the more people think a problem, like global warming, is closer to home and immediate, the more likely they are to act, said Cornell University professor Jonathan Schuldt, an expert in environmental communications. But, he added, if people look online and see that their city is not at higher risk from climate change, that could backfire on the Obama administration and make those people less likely to do something.

The federal government has a clearinghouse website for climate data at [climate.data.gov](http://climate.data.gov) .

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