

Public perception of man-made climate change is at a 10-year high

January 29 2015, by Charlotte Anscombe



The British public's belief in the reality of climate change and its humancauses rose last year following the winter floods, and is now at its highest since 2005, according to a new study.

The research, which was carried out by a team from Cardiff University and The University of Nottingham, also shows that many see climate change as contributing at least in part to the exceptional storms in December 2013 and January 2014.

Although it is very difficult to attribute any single set of weather events to climate change, such extremes of weather are predicted to be more frequent and severe in the UK under a changed climate.

Flooding effects

The team of scientists set out to understand in detail how the British public had responded to the flooding last winter. To do this they surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,002 respondents from across Britain, together with a further group of 995 people drawn from five areas of England and Wales that had been affected by the flooding last winter.

The study found that more people are prepared to accept the reality of climate change:

Close to nine in 10 people (88 per cent) agree that the world's climate is changing, a figure that is up on polling in previous years and close to the highest figure of 91 per cent last found in 2005. Only six per cent did not agree that the climate is changing.

76 per cent of respondents stated that they had personally noticed signs of climate change during their lifetime, with 39 per cent mentioning changing weather patterns or extreme weather; 27 per cent mentioning heavy rainfall, floods, or rising river levels; and 20 per cent changes to the seasons.

The flooding events were seen as a sign of things to come:

Various factors were felt to have contributed a 'fair amount' or a 'great deal' to the flooding and its impacts including: insufficient investment in [flood](#) defences (77 per cent felt this), poor river and coastal management (75 per cent), development including in flood-prone areas (73 per cent), and climate change (61 per cent).

A clear majority of the national sample (72 per cent) agreed with the statement "The floods showed us what we can expect in the future from climate change", while only 10 per cent of the public expressed disagreement with this.

Flood affected people were even more certain about climate change:

The research team analysed the responses of a group of 135 individuals from the flood affected areas, all of whom had had their property directly affected by flood waters last year. This group were even more convinced of the reality and seriousness of climate change.

Not surprisingly, these directly affected people reported experiencing anxiety, anger, and distress, while the public more generally experienced high levels of sympathy with them.

The issue of climate change was far more salient and immediate on a series of different measures amongst the most directly affected group. For example, they were more than twice as likely (29 per cent mentioned it) than the national sample (where only 15 per cent mentioned it) to spontaneously name climate change as one of the three most important issues facing the UK in the next 20 years.

A national concern

Dr Alexa Spence from The University of Nottingham, said:

"Experiencing flooding seems to be a real trigger for reducing people's psychological distance of climate change and people who've experienced flooding are significantly more likely to consider climate change as a salient national concern."

Professor Nick Pidgeon from Cardiff University's School of Psychology, who led the team which carried out the research, said:

"Perhaps we should now ask whether it is time to banish climate scepticism once and for all, and for scientists to be more decisive in demonstrating how our weather will become more extreme in the future if we do not act on [climate change](#)."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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