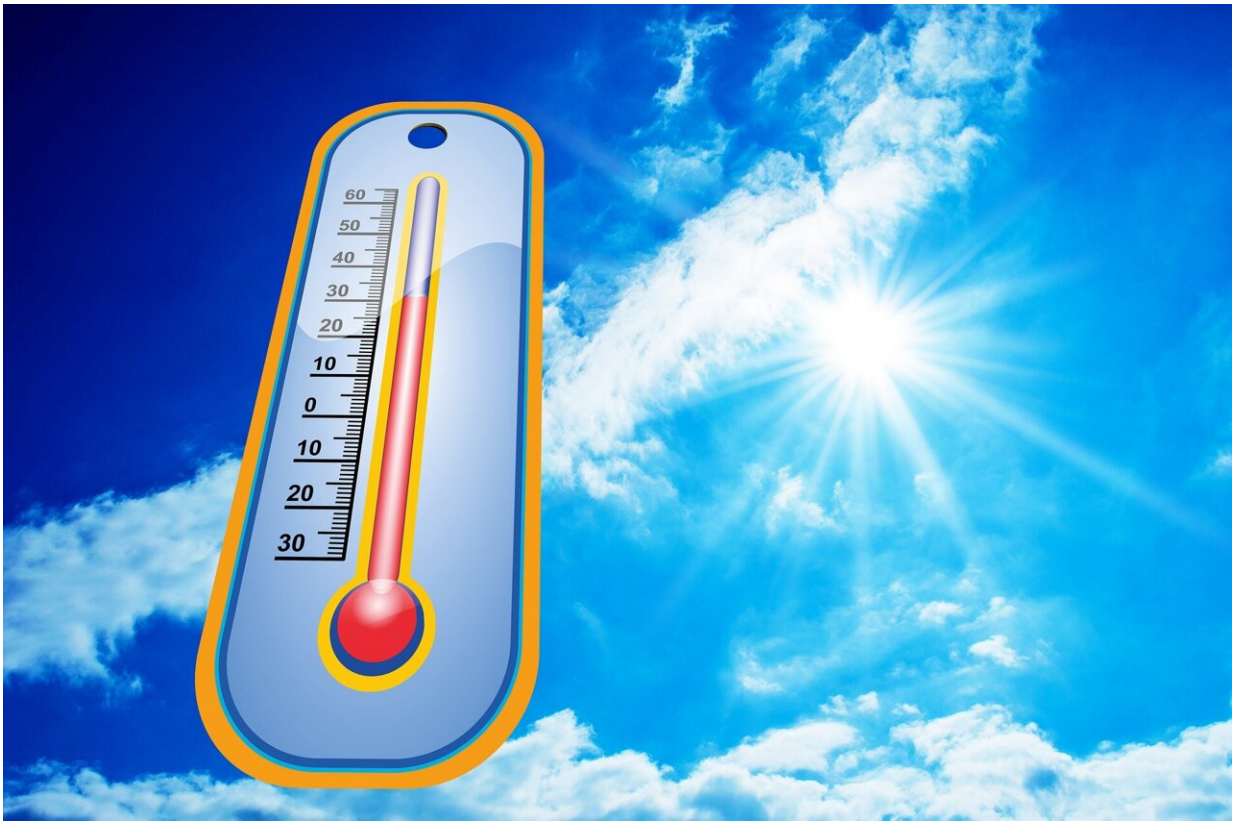


Climate change and extreme heat are making us more anxious

August 11 2022, by Kiffer George Card



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Globally, [heat waves have become an increasingly frequent summer affair](#), as much of the world faces extremely high temperatures.

The rising frequency and intensity of [heat waves](#) can trigger various forms of emotional distress affecting people's [mental health](#). One such emerging form of distress is [eco-anxiety](#), which is defined by the American Psychological Association as [the chronic fear of environmental doom](#) that comes from observing climate change. In other words, people are worried about what a changing planet means for them and future generations.

According to a [landmark survey on eco-anxiety](#), 68% of adults reported experiencing "at least a little eco-anxiety" and 48% of [young people](#) report that climate change negatively affects their daily life and functioning.

As a social and behavioral epidemiologist, I study how environments—social and natural—influence individuals and their health. For example, [recent research by my team at Simon Fraser University](#) found that a small number of people experience debilitating levels of eco-anxiety that cause cognitive and functional impairments that limit their ability to live happy and healthy lives.

Eco-anxiety: Climate change's new coping mechanism

These [worries are normal and even rational](#). We are connected to the land, air and water around us. So when our environments change, a primal sadness and worry is [perfectly appropriate](#) and perhaps even advantageous for survival.

For millennia, people have relied on their ability to monitor, adapt to and migrate within their environment [in order to survive](#). However, what we're facing with climate change is a whole new level of change.

As highlighted by [last year's IPCC report](#), the evidence showing that climate change causes greater frequency and intensity of extreme heat

events is more certain than any other documented effect of climate change. Unfortunately, the same report predicts that global temperatures will continue to rise and their effects will worsen.

Social connections can help cope with climate change

As our environments continue to change, we will need to adapt to a new era of extreme weather.

[UBC's Climate Hub](#) has a number of heat coping strategies for individuals, communities and governments to help you stay safe during extreme heat. These strategies include wearing a wet t-shirt, limiting [outdoor activities](#) during the hottest part of the day, using community misting stations and promoting long-term urban forestry. Meanwhile, the [Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance](#) has identified resources to help people deal with the eco-anxiety that can come from extreme heat.

[It remains unclear what treatments and prevention strategies for eco-anxiety may be most effective](#), as [public health](#) and therapeutic research in this area is an emerging field.

However, one thing is for certain: none of us can fix climate change, at least not alone.

Climate change is a collective problem, not an individual one. Mitigating and adapting to it will require investments to build happier and healthier communities that will ensure that during extreme heat and other weather events people are not left to fend for themselves.

Governments and international agencies must make mental health a priority in the era of climate change if we are going to effectively navigate the challenges ahead. In particular, [local governments](#) must begin processes of identifying climate vulnerabilities and working with

households, neighborhoods and community organizations to address them.

In some areas [such as British Columbia](#), funding is being made available for climate change mitigation and adaptation. This is critical to ensuring climate resilience. It provides a framework for future investments in other jurisdictions and thus helps ease eco-anxiety.

In Canada, [there are an array of community projects](#) that are leading the way in raising awareness about the importance of social connection in promoting health, wellness and resilience. Interventions such as these can ensure that neighborhoods are ready to deal with crises when they come by ensuring neighbors are aware of who in their communities might be vulnerable.

As we continue to deal with [extreme heat](#) this summer, [one of the most important things we can do](#) is work together to stay safe and healthy.

Without dedicated support, the work necessary to adapt to [climate change](#) won't happen until it's too late. The time for climate action is now.

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