

UK must be more proactive in tackling climate change

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The UK is "unprepared" for climate change, an expert from the University of Surrey has concluded following an extensive study.

University of Surrey academic Dr. Candice Howarth says that while the Government and industry is aware of the potential impacts of climate change on future productivity and day to day living, the UK is not joined up on its approach to the threats of warmer summers and wetter winters.

Dr. Howarth, Senior Lecturer in Sustainability and Climate Communication within Surrey's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, was awarded a Research Fellowship in 2016 funded through the Economic and Social Research Council Nexus Network to research communicating climate risks and their environmental impact in the UK. The outcome is Dr. Howarth's book "Resilience to Climate Change: Communication, Collaboration and Co-production".

The book explores current debates on resilience to [hot weather](#). According to NHS figures, in July 2018 the UK saw a 5% increase in hospital admissions as a result of the hot weather, with increased risks to the elderly, the sick and infants. With the frequency and intensity of climate shocks expected to increase under a changing climate, severe implications across food, energy, water and the environment are all anticipated. Dr. Howarth believes that effective proactive strategies for future prevention and management need to be put in place now, recommending government stakeholders learn from past events to tackle future issues.

Dr. Howarth's research explores how to improve resilience to these shocks by assessing contributing factors such as timing of responses to climate shocks, lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities, and knowledge transfer through effective stakeholder collaboration. Her work focuses strongly on learning lessons from

previous events as well as capturing best practice, and she emphasises the importance of embedding communication, collaboration and co-production across policymakers, practitioners, scientific communities and the public.

The study suggests possibilities for the co-design of sustainable, robust and resilient responses, developing an awareness of different cultural settings, investing in more resources, increasing proactive preparation and establishing effective decision making processes all feature as potential solutions.

Dr. Howarth said: "The record-breaking heatwave that hit the country this year is a perfect example of more extreme weather that could become the norm in a changing climate, and therefore we must be better prepared. The long-term impacts of these climate risks are often hugely underestimated. The UK is expected to experience more frequent hot weather events with significant impacts such as heat-related deaths, productivity loss, impacts on agriculture and forestry and disruptions to transport and trade. The UK is unprepared for such shocks and the Government must become more proactive in its approach.

"Warmer weather will have benefits in some industries, particularly in farming, so there are opportunities, but it will also affect crop production, with significant impact on food transfer and trade. With Brexit already placing a question mark over the state of UK trade partnerships, we cannot afford to let weather extremes disrupt food production. How society responds to these risks needs careful examination to ensure we are building resilient responses and minimising impacts."

It isn't just heatwaves that pose a threat in the UK; flooding is also a timely [climate change](#) issue discussed in the book. Certain continents also experience different [climate](#) shocks due to their geographical positioning, and [impact](#) will also be

experienced differently. For example, hurricanes are more of a risk to the East Coast of America and Central America.

As part of her ongoing studies, Dr. Howarth is leading a programme of research on resilience to hot weather risks and also a project in collaboration with the School of Psychology funded by the University's Urban Living Fund entitled "Increasing sustainable travel behaviour in urban environments: proactive and reactive responses to environmental images in a digital setting."

Dr. Howarth's book is published [online](#) and is available in print. Research Fellows Dr. Katya Brooks and Dr. Sian Morse-Jones also assisted in the publication of the book.

Provided by University of Surrey

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