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 that: “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.”  
  
The research was jointly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Leverhulme Trust. Additional support was received from Horizon Digital Economy Research.  
  
**— Ends —**  
  
**Notes to editors**: The University of Nottingham, described by The Sunday Times University Guide 2011 as ‘the embodiment of the modern international university’, has award-winning campuses in the United Kingdom, China and Malaysia. It is ranked in the UK's Top 10 and the World's Top 75 universities by the Shanghai Jiao Tong (SJTU) and the QS World University Rankings. It was named ‘Europe’s greenest university’ in the UI GreenMetric World University Ranking, a league table of the world’s most environmentally-friendly higher education institutions, which ranked Nottingham second in the world overall.  
  
The University is committed to providing a truly international education for its 40,000 students, producing world-leading research and benefiting the communities around its campuses in the UK and Asia.  
  
More than 90 per cent of research at The University of Nottingham is of international quality, according to the most recent Research Assessment Exercise, with almost 60 per cent of all research defined as ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’. Research Fortnight analysis of RAE 2008 ranked the University 7th in the UK by research power. The University’s vision is to be recognised around the world for its signature contributions, especially in global food security, energy & sustainability, and health.  
More news from the University at: www.nottingham.ac.uk/news  
  
The ESRC is the UK's largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues. It supports independent, high quality research which has an impact on business, the public sector and the third sector. The ESRC’s total budget for 2010/11 is £218 million. At any one time the ESRC supports over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes.  More at: www.esrc.ac.uk  
  
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Horizon is a Research Institute at The University of Nottingham engaged in Digital Economy Research. Established in 2009, this venture represents an initial £40million investment by Research Councils UK, The University of Nottingham and over 40 academic and industrial partners in both a Research Hub and Doctoral Training Centre within the RCUK Digital Economy programme.