

# How does behaviour affect people's responses to extreme weather events?

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## SWM's role:

Sub-contractors to lead partner Aecom

SWM Project Manager: Alan Carr (Senior Sustainability Adviser)

## Customers:



## WM Sustainability Roadmap themes addressed:



## Project Duration:

September 2018 – February 2020

## The Project

This is one of seven research projects commissioned by the [Committee on Climate Change](#) (CCC) to inform the development of the [third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment](#) (CCRA), due for publication in 2022. The project looked at how people have reacted to extreme weather and why, and what behaviours people and communities demonstrate when they are preparing for, responding to and recovering from an extreme weather event.

## Aims

The findings of this research will be used to help inform the development of the UK CCRA to ensure that its outputs adequately reflect how the impact of climate change on extreme weather events will affect communities and what support needs to be provided to



communities most at risk to enable better preparedness.

## SWM's role

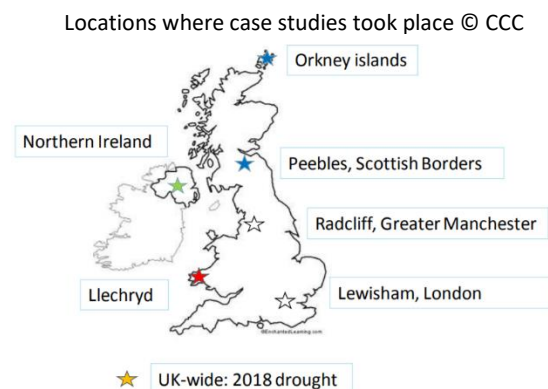
The consultancy Aecom approached SWM to act in the role as sub-contractor, as they recognised our experience and track record of engaging with communities and stakeholders on the climate resilience agenda. Our tasks included:

- Engaging with nationwide stakeholders to identify local communities in the UK that had been affected by extreme weather events
- Interviewing individuals within these communities about their experiences of an extreme weather event, while considering the sensitive nature of the topic
- Commenting on and disseminating a survey to the community members through trusted channels
- Identifying relevant contacts at water companies in the UK and interviewing them to develop an idea of how they responded to the UK summer drought of 2018 and how they worked with communities to reduce water use
- Providing critical analyses of Aecom's written outputs and peer review the final report.

## Challenges

The first challenge was identifying communities that had been affected by an extreme weather event in recent years that (i) contained individuals willing to be interviewed about their experiences and behaviours and (ii) had an established community network that could be used as a route in to this engagement. It took time and consideration, bearing in mind the trauma people go through during these events, to ensure that we found a community worthy of further study, but that had not already experienced "interview fatigue" as a result of being a subject of previous projects.

Once the communities were identified, engaging with them in the right way was hugely important. It is not appropriate to start requesting interviews and sending out survey links to people directly as that would come across as lacking understanding and be very intrusive. Instead, identifying a leader in the community such as someone who coordinates a flood response group, as was the case in Radcliffe in Manchester, was critical to ensuring response levels were high. The interviews with residents also needed to include time for them to talk about their experiences even if they weren't always directly answering our questions; living through flood damage, for example, can be debilitating in so many ways and we had to appreciate their right to express their views on the response and support they received.



## The Outcomes

Ultimately, the outcomes of this project will be realised once authorities start acting on the messages given in the third CCRA. There is no doubt, however, that the findings of this project will focus minds on the challenges communities face when extreme weather hits. Engaging with people

who have lived through such experiences is the only way one can possibly begin to imagine what these challenges are like and how long they last and that is what this research had at its heart. Consultant or academic reports are not going to change the lives of these residents; listening to their stories and their challenges and acting upon these is more likely to bring about this change.

## **In the Future**

It is hoped that CCC use the findings of this work to encourage Government and other policymakers and practitioners to look at what climate change may be like for many more people, based on the experiences of those who have gone through the pain and anguish of extreme weather damage and destruction already. SWM's role in supporting the CCC with this overarching principle continues as we now lead a consortium in helping to improve the accessibility of the next CCRA so that more people can use and engage with it and, ultimately, aid adaptation to climate change.

## **Contact Details**

For further information on the project or to work with us in one of a variety of ways, please contact the SWM team on 0121 237 5890 or [enquiries@swm.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@swm.org.uk).