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Acclimatise! You can't afford to cop out!

Climate change could result in local authorities seeing an increase in claims from the employees and the public. In this article, we share our top 10 tips for mitigating the risk of claims.

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The Intergovernmental Panel report Climate Change 2021 – The Physical Science Base led to alarming headlines around the world about how close we are to missing our window of opportunity to limit global temperature rise to 1.5ºC.

The report set out likely regional implications of climate change - which could in turn, result in local authorities seeing an increase in claims. In this article we share our top 10 tips for mitigating against these.

Anticipated changes and impact

For Western Europe, the report perhaps unsurprisingly, predicts:

- an increase in temperature of up to 2ºC on pre-industrial levels;
- an increase in pluvial flooding (surface water and flash flooding), river flooding and coastal flooding; and
- an increase in extreme precipitation (storm and rain) events.

On temperature, it predicts an increase in extreme heat events and a decrease in extreme cooling events. This will affect agriculture (with changes to growing seasons and crop resilience) and health (heat-related dehydration and heat exhaustion, and new diseases, illnesses, and parasites). This will force changes to our housing stock (for example, fitting external shutters and increased cooling costs) and possibly to how we live (with the potential need to adapt school and working hours).

Flooding will become much more frequent, from all sources. This requires further investment in flood protection infrastructure, changes to our existing building stock, future buildings to be flood protected or designed to adapt to flooding, and changes to farming practices to safeguard land, crops and livestock.

As well as increased risk of flooding, increased precipitation could cause damage to highways and greater pressure on drainage systems.

All of this will impact significantly on the insurance industry, leading to increased claims in some areas. For domestic and commercial insurers, this will be mainly linked to property damage.

Anticipated claims

For risk managers within local authorities, the impacts are likely to lead to an increase in claims arising from:

- damaged highways and footpaths;
- damage to properties — caused by surface water flooding in areas where a council is the lead local flood authority;
- damage to properties caused by extreme precipitation events.

Councils may also see claims from employees suffering from illness caused or exacerbated by heat in the workplace.

Mitigating risk

- Ensure there is a thorough programme of highways maintenance, together with additional inspections following flooding and extreme precipitation events, with rapid repair.

- Consider council-owned housing stock, its location, and the likelihood of it flooding from any source. Where risks are highest, take steps to protect houses.
- Ensure new housing stock and other council-owned buildings are built to the highest environmental specifications, with embedded future-proofing and sustainability.
- In respect of other council properties, assess location and construction features for the likelihood of all kinds of flooding (particularly pluvial). Do not rely solely on historic data on flood events to assess risk. Employ new modelling, incorporating climate change variations.
- Consider moving essential services from high-risk buildings or sites – for example, refuse architecture and fleet. Consider moving essential assets elsewhere within locations — for example, garages uphill, or computer servers and boiler rooms to upper floors. Where relocation is not possible or desired, consider steps to prevent flooding.
- Ensure you use your planning function to drive the highest standards in environmental and sustainable specifications for future private buildings – including rainwater harvesting, saturation ponds and marshes, tree planting, urban green spaces, and sustainable urban drainage. All can help manage surface water flooding.
- Ensure that, wherever possible, hardstanding in its ownership (for example, around buildings, on housing estates and in urban centres) is replaced with grass, and that sustainable urban drainage schemes are fitted, where appropriate, to help reduce the amount of water travelling into surface-water drains.
- Regularly inspect, maintain, improve, and add surface-water drainage systems.
- Adapt properties to be cooler – consider designing in roof overhangs, specifying heat transfer systems like heat pumps; installing external shutters or awnings, or heat-reflective glass; improving insulation; and growing foliage outside of buildings.
- Consider working patterns for employees at the hottest times of the year, so they can work when it is cooler.

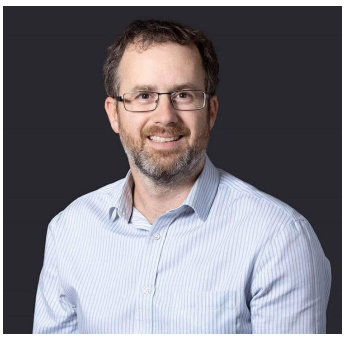
All of the above are sensible investments, which will produce a long-term cost benefit gain, when offset with the costs of retrofitting in the future, as well as probable heat-related claims that may arise; however, without doubt, the most effective way to mitigate projected changes in our climate is to limit global heating to less than 1.5ºC.

Summary

Councils are uniquely placed to work with local communities and businesses to contribute to zero-carbon communities, and environmental gain equates with humanity's gain. Risk managers can help councils understand the cost benefit analysis of taking more significant steps to protect citizens and local environments from the most damaging impacts of climate change.

For further information on how we can help you mitigate against claims please contact James Fawcett or Ben Standing.

Contact



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