

Newsday

Long Island, other U.S. coastal cities should spend billions to combat climate change flooding

By Allan Bonner, Tribune News Service



(Credit: Johnny Milano)

In the 1960s, people had an explanation for the changing weather: “the bomb.” In the 1970s, it was “the greenhouse effect.” We’ve since adopted the terms global warming and climate change.

Whatever the phenomenon is called, it requires action.

A recent article in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences states that a 2-degree rise in global temperatures could flood the land that about 19 million Americans call home.

About 40 percent of that land is in Florida. Also affected are California, Louisiana and New York - the states with the highest proportion of coastal cities in America.

What's the threat? Boston's emergency plan notes that the weather in Massachusetts may be more like that of the Carolinas by the end of this century.

Since 1991, most of Boston's emergencies have been caused by flooding, and winter precipitation there could continue to rise, according to a mayoral climate change report.

Extreme floods could occur every two or three years by 2050.

Boston already has pumps ready to keep roads open during regular flooding, and it will need more.

Climate change will also bring more extreme heat days, which hurt seniors and those with respiratory problems

What's the threat?



(Credit: AP)

Meanwhile, Baltimore's emergency plan notes that all federal emergencies there have been related to snow, rain or flooding in the past 50 years.

In their emergency plans, Boston, Baltimore and Philadelphia list their vulnerable facilities, including ones they'll need in order to respond to flooding. It's hard to take refuge in a shelter or go to a hospital when it's under water.

Philadelphia's list of critical assets in the floodplain include three railway stations, one subway and trolley station, an airport, a police station, emergency medical services and fire stations, five schools, a dialysis center, one water treatment facility, two electric substations and 42 hazardous material reporting centers.

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Austin, the bustling state capital of Texas, notes that flash floods have been the No. 1 storm-related killer there over the past 25 years.

The plan of San Jose, Calif., lists 1,093 “soft,” multifamily buildings that house 27,308 occupants and would be vulnerable to flooding.

This is especially alarming given that the national insurance fund is regularly hit by repetitive loss incidents in buildings that flood more than once.

Simple solutions will save money and lives. Boston’s waterfront park design helps combat flooding and soil erosion. New types of asphalt will absorb and even filter water so it can go back into the drinking water supply, not into your basement.

Soft landscaping absorbs water and looks good, too. All homeowners can raise appliances, hot water tanks and electrical boxes high enough to survive a flood.

You don’t need to believe in climate change to believe in the benefit of more trees in our cities, which provide shade and retain water.

Long Island, N.Y., juts out into the rough Atlantic Ocean but doesn’t have a prominent evacuation plan in place.

Directions for driving out of a hurricane’s path may be useless if debris fills the road. All of us who live near water need to remember that 6 inches of water can knock a person off his feet and that a car can float in 2 feet of water.

When it comes to climate change, even tough, business-minded skeptics need to be part of the solution. You can’t move products over roads that are underwater, and you can’t store inventories in warehouses with the roofs blown off.

And you certainly can’t sell your goods and services to dead people.

Allan Bonner is an urban planner and crisis manager based in Toronto. Readers may email him at allan@allanbonner.com.

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