

Local governments are in a position to tailor climate change preparedness strategies to the unique set of impacts localities will likely face.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions today will play a critical role in determining how much climate change we experience in the future. As we cannot alter the changes already set in motion, governments need to take steps to prepare for climate change impacts. Planning for climate change and its specific local and regional effects may help reduce the associated socio-economic and environmental costs while also creating opportunities to capitalize on opportunities.

What is the responsibility of local governments?

It may be a half-century or more before international and national policies lead to substantive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global average temperature. Climate change is a global trend, but the impacts will be most felt at the local level. Communities are on the front lines and obvious impacts could include increased risk of extreme events such as storms, flooding and forest fires; more heat related stress and spread of vector-borne disease into a community.

In many cases, communities are already facing these problems to some degree. Still, climate change raises the stakes in managing these problems by changing the frequency, intensity, extent and magnitude of these problems. Local governments are in a position to tailor climate change preparedness strategies to the unique set of impacts localities will likely face. As local governments are responsible for community development and hazard mitigation, they can influence the degree to which a community will be sensitized to climate change impacts.



photo: Michelle Laurie

The 2007 Columbia Basin Trust Symposium brought a diversity of Basin residents together to connect, share and learn from each other about change and sustainability.

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How does this affect my current way of doing business?

Climate change is unlike most other public priorities in that it directly or indirectly affects a broad range of resources and activities across communities. This includes water resources, energy, public health, agriculture, forests, transportation, land use planning, stormwater management and emergency management.

Climate change will require that you plan more effectively with evolving, imperfect information. Waiting for certainty can lead to high social and financial costs. Understanding the potential impacts and taking practical steps based on available information enables you to reduce future risk and realize possible benefits.

Planning for the future can benefit the present. For instance, considering the impacts of climate change on water supply and demand in design criteria for a new reservoir can help ensure the new reservoir meets future water needs and may be less costly than having to expand the reservoir in the future (if expansion is even possible). Zoning that concentrates development in an area at risk to future flooding can be altered before that area is built out. Warmer winter temperatures could lead to cost savings from reduced winter road maintenance requirements.

Regional knowledge and experts may be good resources for finding out how climate change may affect your community. In BC, the Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium has regional data (<http://pacificclimate.org>).

The past is no longer a reliable guide to the future. However, much can be gained from looking at the impacts of past extreme events on communities, infrastructure and natural systems. The key now is to avoid anchoring decisions completely in historical records.



"Mitigation and adaptation are like eating and drinking, both are necessary".
---Ron Sims, Executive, King County, USA

What if my community wants to focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

There is a perception that if you focus on preparing for climate change, you are giving up the fight to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Limiting future damage to your community and the world requires both reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for climate change impacts. If your community is already focused on greenhouse gas emissions reduction, seize the moment to start a community conversation about climate change impacts and the potential for climate change to exacerbate existing problems.

In many cases, climate change will exacerbate high priority management concerns rather than creating completely new challenges. Therefore, you may find that efforts to address existing concerns affected by climate change may simultaneously reduce vulnerability to projected climate impacts. You can incorporate existing information on climate change impacts into plans and designs if you write those documents to accommodate a reasonable range of projected extremes and update these plans as information improves.

What does being resilient mean?

Mitigation

Reduce Greenhouse Gases which fuel Climate Change

- City's own operations
- Residences & businesses
- Set example & influence others, including local & international governments

Mitigation: the globally responsible thing to do

Adaptation

Reduce the Impact of Climate Change

- Engage residents, business & other stakeholders
- Identify vulnerabilities: operations & populations
- Prioritize sensitivities & corrective actions

Adaptation: the locally responsible thing to do

Diagrams adapted from: City of Toronto Climate Adaptation Steering Group, 2007.
Text adapted from: Climate Impacts Group, <http://cse.washington.edu/cig/fpt/guidebook.shtml>, 2007

