

Floods &

Mary Twist investigates how climate change will affect the UK and what you can do about it.

The water rushes and rolls, tumbling over itself in its hurry. Nothing will stand in its way; it pushes through dry stone walls, lifts up tarmac and begins its toxic invasion. All anyone can do is retreat upstairs, listen to the roar and watch the inevitable deluge consume cars, gardens and homes. What was once a warm and comfortable living room is now waist-deep in sludgy, dirty, stinking, brown water. Furniture merrily bobs around in the chaos, ruined and useless. Everything goes dark - the electricity is out. There is nowhere to go, the water is everywhere. As people try to settle in for a night in the dark and the cold, they have to come to terms with the fact that the cruel river has visited them in their home - again.

This is the Cumbria floods.

This is climate change.

It should come as no surprise that our weather systems are changing. The planet has warmed by nearly a degree already. Even this seemingly small rise has a big effect on our climate. It's a misnomer

to think of 'global warming' as something that will make us have better summers. Climate change will affect us in many different ways and in the UK, flooding is probably the worst consequence of our failure to prevent emissions into our delicate atmosphere.

The huge amounts of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide (CO₂), that we have sent skyward through industry, farming and travel, have caused our atmosphere to absorb more heat from the Sun. A warmer atmosphere holds more water vapour, which won't increase the frequency of rain, but can make it heavier when it falls. Existing river systems can't hold the extra water and so burst their banks - exactly what we are seeing in Cumbria and North Lancashire this winter.

Six years ago, when areas of the north west of England flooded, we were told that this was a 'once in a hundred years' event. But the latest weather has proved us wrong. And there is no reason to think that this situation will improve in the coming years. The complex wheels of atmosphere, climate and weather have been set in motion and all we can do now is limit the damage.

Fears

What Can You Do?

A major cause of climate change is emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide. There are some things we can do to make sure the damage doesn't get any worse.

- Walk as often as you can. Cars (and other vehicles) pump out CO₂.
- Go meat-free three days a week. Believe it or not, 18% of greenhouse gas emission comes from livestock farming.
- Don't keep boiling the kettle. Every time you boil your kettle and then reboil it because you left it to go cold, you are using electricity that puts greenhouse gases into the air.
- Turn everything off at night - you will save on your energy bills, cut down your fire risk and reduce your carbon footprint. It's a win-win!
- Take short showers rather than a bath. Showers use far less water and this keeps your electricity and water bills down. And you'll still be clean!
- Cut down on your junk mail - register with the mail preference service at mpsonline.org.uk, to have your name and address removed from databases.
- Shop seasonally and locally. Food transportation is expensive in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and out-of-season food is usually grown intensively, using heat and light to create the correct conditions.