



## Counting the cost of climate change

Autumn 2000 brought extreme weather to Britain. Flooding was the worst and most widespread in 100 years. More than 3000 homes were flooded across Britain and our transport system was paralysed.

Extreme weather is no longer simply a natural event. The current changes to our climate cannot now be separated from the impact of fossil fuel pollution. Unless we break our addiction to fossil fuels like oil and coal we are set to experience even greater changes.

### Counting the Cost

10% of the population (some 5 million people) and 12% of agricultural land in Britain are at risk from flooding. This accounts for £200 billion worth of property and land worth more than £7 billion.

**Insurance:** In 1999, weather-related claims cost the insurance industry £860 million. The 2000 autumn storms cost industry an estimated £500 million. According to the Association of British Insurers, insurance premiums are likely to increase if recent weather patterns continue. Subsidence – on the increase as summers get hotter and drier because of climate change – has already caused a steady rise in household insurance premiums over the last 15 years.

**Flood Defences:** The UK spends £200 million a year building flood defences. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods predicts that if investment in flood defences continues to be limited to current levels, the yearly cost of flood damage will reach £1.8 billion.

**Housing:** Surveyors estimate that the value of properties built on the flood plains or near rivers and coastal areas could plunge by as much as 25%. Government estimates suggest that overhauling residential and commercial building methods to cope with flood 'alleviation' and other extreme weather effects could cost £26 billion over the next 30 years. The rising costs are likely to be met through higher property prices.

## **Future impacts**

In the last ten years, the UK has suffered four of the hottest summers since records began. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts a rapid increase in global warming and severe weather as a consequence of human activities such as burning fossil fuels.

A new EU report backs this up, concluding that Britain will become warmer and wetter. Winters will be warmer with more flooding, tornadoes and intense rainstorms. The South of England faces long droughts interspersed with violent flooding.

The Gulf Stream, which channels warm sea water from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Coast of Northern Europe, currently keeps Britain warmer than other countries this far North. A minor rise in temperature in the Arctic could disrupt the Gulf Stream, resulting in dramatic changes to Britain's weather and climate.

As rising sea levels of between 4mm and 6mm a year threaten the coast of Britain, coastal defence may cease to be either effective or economical. Low-lying farmland and coastal towns risk disappearing altogether.

The Thames barrier provides temporary protection for homes at risk around London. It has only been used 30 times since it was built. The Environment Agency expects that by 2080 it may have to be used 300 days a year.

## **The road ahead**

Greenpeace calls for a massive Government programme for renewable energy and green fuels. Such a programme would:

- help reduce the risk of increased extreme weather from climate change
- reduce health impacts from fossil fuel pollution
- build a new energy technology industry for Britain.