Hearst Television ‘Forecasting Our Future’ 2022 Survey

This survey was conducted by the Hearst Television National Investigative Unit as part of its series, ‘Forecasting Our Future,’ which aired throughout 2022. The survey link was sent to more than 4,000 communities nationwide: every county in America and all cities with populations over 50,000 people in all 50 states, along with Washington, D.C. The survey was conducted between Jan. 10, 2022-Feb. 4, 2022, and responses were furnished on the record. Respondents were asked nine main questions about how their community is – or is not – dealing with a changing climate and increasingly severe weather events, how much they estimate response or mitigation efforts may cost taxpayers, and whether the topic has been a source of controversy in their community. Respondents were asked to disclose their identity and government. Survey results reflect the answers of the respondents; not all respondents answered all questions.

Some of the questions were multiple choice and others asked respondents to leave written answers. For those written answers, Hearst Television has provided a sample of the total responses received.

Researchers or media outlets who wish to use this data for educational, administrative, or reporting purposes may do so with mandatory courtesy to the “Hearst Television National Investigative Unit.” For questions about this survey, please contact: investigate@hearst.com.
1. As a leader in your city/county/parish/township, are you concerned about the effects of future extreme weather events on your community?
453 responses

- Yes: 76.8%
- No: 23.2%

2. Has your city/county/parish/township already felt the effects of a changing climate (may include more extreme weather events, hotter temperatures, destructive wildfires/forest fires, drought, etc)?
450 responses

- Yes: 35.1%
- No: 64.9%

If yes, please describe how, with as many specifics as possible.

- “We’ve seen increased flooding, more landslides due to stormwater runoff and ground softening, and more forest and brush fires in the last 10 years than in decades past.” – Fayette County, Pennsylvania

- “Atypical snowfall has accumulated in recent years, leading to regional transit delays. Extreme heat waves have occurred; 21 residents of Pierce County died in 2021 of heat-related illness during the hottest wave of the summer.” – City of Lakewood, Washington
● “Reduced snowpack which impacts our water supply but also impacts our winter recreation opportunities, a key economic driver for us.” – City of Bend, Oregon

● “Sea levels in Boston have already risen by nearly a foot. We've already seen about two degrees Fahrenheit (about 1 degree C) of warming.” – City of Boston, Massachusetts

● “The 4 W’s: Warmer, Wetter, Wilder Weather.” – Cuyahoga County, Ohio

● “Historic wildfires over the past decade, the most recent being the most destructive in state history. Catastrophic flooding, extreme wind events, prolonged drought conditions, earlier and more severe storm events, historic number of extreme-heat days, increasingly poor air quality days due to ozone and wildfire smoke.” – City of Boulder, Colorado

● “We have had flooding in recent years, but not due to climate change.” – Freemont County, Iowa

● “Storms have overwhelmed our existing drainage infrastructure.” – Baldwin County, Georgia

● “Our region faces smoke and unhealthy air each summer for up to six weeks. Our region experienced one of the most devastating fires in the State of Oregon. Our county lost 2,600 homes in one day, displacing over 5,500 people many of whom have not regained the housing that they lost.” – City of Medford, Oregon

● “Glaciers melting at extreme rates of speed. Mass die-offs of marine wildlife. Unpredictable and unusual weather, like extreme winds and cold and unseasonably warm weather.” – Skagway Borough, Alaska

3. Is your city/county/parish/township currently taking steps to address the effects of a changing climate (may include hotter temperatures, more extr... destructive wildfires/forest fires, drought, etc)?

453 responses

![Pie chart showing 44.4% Yes and 55.6% No]
If yes, please describe in detail what your government is doing.

- “Efforts to reduce carbon emissions through solar, electric fleets, food composting and waste reduction, shared multi modal transportation. Ordinance that sets energy efficiency standards for rental properties.” – City of Gainesville, Florida
- “Climate resilience planning, tree planting, carbon sequestration, and stormwater utility” – City of Fayetteville, Arkansas
- “Effective Forest Management.” – Lincoln County, Wisconsin
- “We are working on a micro-grid, investing in EV’s and a solar farm for City operations.” – City of Bowie, Maryland
- “Funding is limited. The best the parish can do is to propose minor flood mitigation projects after a storm has already occurred. Preventative measures are limited.” – Jefferson Davis Parish, Louisiana
- “Increasing the tree canopy, replacing gas vehicles with electric or hybrid when feasible, increasing photovoltaics on city buildings, improving pedestrian infrastructure, increasing number of EV charging stations at city facilities, and improving traffic signal synchronization.” – City of El Cajon, California
- “Implementing Burn Bans, restructuring work for our highway departments for droughts, and constantly watching sales tax and ad volerum tax for our county.” – Alfalfa County, Oklahoma
- “We are in the process of constructing a 2.5M gallon water storage tank ($20M) and recently installed $15M in solar panels for City facilities which will reduce our reliance on non-renewable resources.” – City of Madera, California
- “Complying with state and federal laws.” - New Kent County, Virginia
If yes, please describe in detail what your government is doing.

- "We are working on implementing an ‘Apples for Apples’ Green Neighborhood Improvement Program that would give property owner/builders an incentive to convert energy-inefficient homes into energy-efficient homes." – Town of Huntington, New York

- "Climate change summits and ongoing panel discussions on air quality." – Northampton County, Pennsylvania

- "We plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. To do this, we need to reduce emissions by 44% by 2030, from the business as usual emissions projection." – City of Flagstaff, Arizona

- "The City’s electric utility is planning to develop a new analysis for achieving carbon neutral energy for the City. The analysis will be taken into consideration building electrification, transportation electrification, and the need to achieve 100% renewable or zero-emitting electricity to serve to the entire city." – City of Riverside, California

- "Adding sand to our coastline, monitoring coastal infrastructure, evaluating coastal bluffs, implementing/mandating water conservation measures, mandating fire fuel mitigation on private properties, established cool zones." – City of Encinitas, California

If no, please explain why not.

- "There is no proof of ‘increasingly severe weather events.’ That’s a canard." – La Porte County, Indiana

- "We live in the Middle of Kansas!" - Stafford County, Kansas
• “Resources are limited at the local level.” – Scotland County, North Carolina

• “We have not seen a significant climate change in our area.” – Butler County, Kentucky

• “Reactive instead of proactive.” – Kittson County, Minnesota

• “As a very small county, we simply do not have the resources, financially or from a manpower standpoint, to put together a team to address such concerns.” - County of Lawrence, Illinois

• “Humans cannot control Mother nature; Weather events occur over extended periods of time.” – Wayne County, Pennsylvania

• “We can’t make it rain.” – Hamilton County, Kansas

• “This is a republican dominated community where they tend to believe conspiracy theory over science. Secondly, we are as far inland as you can get in Florida so people don’t think of sea level rise for instance.” – Highlands County, Florida

• “We are not having extreme changes or destruction so to our commissioners, addressing current situations like roads and public safety are a priority.” – Kingman County, Kansas

• “Continue to increase training for EMA and work toward a better weather alert system.” – Lamar County, Alabama

• “We will address issues as they become apparent. We are not experiencing effects at this point.” – Morrow County, Ohio

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5. Will your city/county/parish/township need additional funding to accomplish your plans for addressing a changing climate?

429 responses

- Yes: 63.4%
- No: 36.6%
If yes, please describe how.

- "Residents and visitors may believe that taxpayer dollars will not have an impact on climate change or it is unnecessary." – **Otter Tail County, Minnesota**

- "Community members believing "climate change is highly exaggerated and just another liberal extremist agenda being forced on the public" or "no scientific proof that climate change is a direct result of humans". – **Larimer County, Colorado**

- "Politics." – **Dyersburg County, Tennessee**
● “Mainly in terms of potential costs of projects. Limited to almost no climate skeptics.” – Nantucket County, Massachusetts

● “Climate change discussions of any kind are still controversial, as advocates for climate action are too often seen as opposing job creation or that climate change related policies put too much burden on businesses.” – Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

● “Denial and conservatism are factors in not addressing the issue.” – Hooker County, Nebraska

● “Honestly, we talk about it as flooding, not as an impact of climate change. If we were to do the latter, it may be more difficult to address.” – Staunton County, Virginia

● “Feedback has been received that efforts to address climate change will ultimately limit housing and transportation options for residents.” – City of Rancho Cucamonga, California

● “Some want more aggressive goals and timelines and others don’t want any additional regulation.” – City of Grand Rapids, Michigan

● “Climate change is still largely viewed as a partisan, rather than practical, issue by residents. And because the effects of climate change haven’t been strongly felt here, it is also seen as something of a niche topic, irrelevant to the lives of residents.” – Crawford County, Kansas

7. Does your city/county/parish/township have a department, team, or FTE/PTE position with a primary focus on changing climate issues like those listed earlier in this survey?

453 responses

![Pie chart showing the responses to the question. 69.1% of respondents answered Yes, and 30.9% answered No.]
If no, does your government intend to create such a position, team, or department in the next year?

308 responses

8. If your government is communicating with your constituents (residents, businesses, organizations, or other stakeholders) about plans to address a changing climate, please describe those types of communications with as many specifics as possible.

- “Social media, e-newsletters, advertisements in local newspapers, signage on digital message monitors throughout the county and standard press releases sent to local news outlets.” – Orange County, North Carolina
- “The County publishes an annual report of our progress by fiscal year.” – Pima County, Arizona
- “The Mayor communicates with constituents in press conferences and at special events, such as Arbor Day and Earth Day events and Climate Marches. Since we are still in the analysis phase, concrete plans have not yet been developed.” – Erie County, Pennsylvania
- “We have a climate action advisory team, that is made up of residents from the community. We also discuss these issues internally and with external stakeholders through the county’s Comprehensive Plan.” – Snohomish County, Washington
- “Via a newsletter delivered to every household in the city.” – City of El Cajon, California
- “Dedicated flood website, specific flood outreach for impacted properties, cost-share programs.” – City of Davenport, Iowa
- “Not broadly yet but probably something that should be done.” – City of Racine, Wisconsin
- “We talk about the symptom (flooding, heavy storms) not the actual problem.” – Staunton County, Virginia
"Currently, our government has a sustainability page, but we are not directly addressing climate change." – City Edmond, Oklahoma

"For the first time in the history of our City, we have hired a fulltime Chief Resilience Officer... Her focus is broader than effects of climate change, but that is certainly a part of it." – City of Mobile, Alabama

9. If there are any additional comments you’d like to leave about your government’s approach to addressing a changing climate, please include them

"This is one of our top priorities over the next 5 years." – Tompkins County, New York

"Money is always a factor." – City of Elgin, Illinois

"Not all projects that address a changing climate are flagged as "climate" projects - addressing a changing climate tends to affect all kinds of projects as it establishes the conditions that we are working within." – City of Bend, Oregon

"Addressing a changing climate is a complex issue that cannot be tackled by focusing on environmental and economic factors alone. Social justice, equity, and understanding obligations to our root culture play a key role in realizing action." - County of Hawai‘i, Hawai‘i

"In flooding situations the septic system is often overlooked. You can raise residential structures, but it is more difficult to raise the sanitary system. We have created Nitrogen Protection Zones that require a more contained septic system/ treatment system (I/A OWTS) with the possibility of a shallow drainage field." – City of Brookhaven, New York

"Just starting the effort, but continuing to learn as we go." - Lehigh County, Pennsylvania

"Additional resources are required. For example, the City would like to construct a wastewater treatment plant for purple pipe but we are simply not in a position to do so financially. If we could, this would lead to less groundwater pumping and would reduce impacts on the prolonged drought." – Madera County, California

“It’s been effective and allowed our local legislators from "both sides of the aisle“ to support our efforts.” – Staunton County, Virginia

“More than ten years ago we held a sustainability forum for the public. It was shut down because of wild conspiracies that we were colluding with the UN to take over people's property rights, and climate change was a "hoax." I believe now that more people are informed about climate change. It is unavoidable. The City has had strong leadership. I believe there needs to be stronger action by the State in terms of educating the public.” – City of Edmond, Oklahoma

“Local governments in Wisconsin are under a very restrictive levy limit, so it is very difficult to find additional funding for anything on a year-to-year basis. That is why, for us, some funding support is a key part of how we approach this.” – Portage County, Wisconsin