

Climate change will result in more catastrophic weather events, says expert at water board AGM

By [staff1](#) on September 11, 2013



Robert Sandford (second from left), one of Canada's leading experts on climate change, gave the keynote address at the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Annual General Meeting last Friday in Kelowna. Following his presentation, Sandford discussed key issues with those in attendance.

Climate change is going to result in larger and more frequent catastrophic weather events across Canada and around the world and the only way to reverse this frightening trend is for world leaders and citizens to making positive change a priority, says an internationally-respected expert on water and climate policy.

Bob Sandford, EPCOR chair of the Canadian Partnership Initiative in support of the United Nations' "Water For Life" Decade, was the keynote speaker during the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Annual General Meeting last Friday at the Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna.

Sandford's speech was entitled Floods, Fires and Forecast: Managing Water in a Disastrously Changing West.

Natural disasters like the unprecedented flooding that caused billions of dollars in damage to Alberta in June are going to become more frequent due to global warming, said Sandford.

Governments and citizens around the world must recognize global warming and climate change is a real and growing problem and action must be taken sooner rather than later or major natural disasters are going to continue to wreak havoc and destroy lives and property, said Sandford.

“Sooner or later, we’re going to have to take the reduction of greenhouse gases seriously,” he said.

A failure to do so will guarantee that severe weather events like the flooding in Alberta will become more common and dangerous in the future, he said.

“This problem is not going to be addressable unless everyone is engaged,” he said.

Grassroots organizations like the OBWB are crucial in this battle as the numerous programs they have in place relating to water management have a huge impact on major watercourses and regional weather patterns, he said.

The good news is there is still plenty of time to begin the process to slow the rate of global warming, he said.

“I’m here to say the sky is not falling and the world is not coming to an end,” said Sandford. “But it’s going to take a recognition this is a real problem and that we want to do something about it ... and it’s going to take effective leadership.”

Sandford lives in Canmore, Alberta, which was one of the hardest hit communities during the recent Alberta floods.

The massive increase in greenhouse gases around the world has negatively disrupted “the world’s hydrological cycle” which has led to larger and more frequent destructive weather events, said Sandford.

Around the world, weather-related disasters now rank second in terms of affecting the global economy, he said.

The deterioration of Arctic sea ice over the past 20 years has had a direct impact on the world’s jet stream, which determines the movement of warm and cold fronts, he said.

Most major flooding and massive storms are caused by the flow of these jet streams across oceans and continents, he said.

Anyone who questions global warming should read scientific studies about the massive amount of Arctic Sea Ice that has melted over the past two decades, he said.

The melting of vast amounts of Arctic sea ice has resulted in an overall increase in temperatures around the world.

“If we continue to lose the refrigerating effect of Arctic sea ice, we will continue to see the direct effect on rising temperatures around the world,” he said.

It’s no coincidence the number and magnitude of major disasters in Europe and North America has greatly increased over the past 20 years as this is directly related to the reduction in the amount of Arctic sea ice, he said.

“What is happening in the north is happening in the rest of Canada” as severe weather events are taking place more often in every province, he said.

Persistent and regular flooding in certain parts of Canada and the United States are causing so much damage it is “affecting government’s ability to handle the economic impact” of these events, he said.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada has warned provincial and municipal leaders that “they have to become serious about mitigating loss” or they may end up facing legal challenges in the near future, said Sandford.

The floods in Alberta in June made it clear that province’s flood warning system was inadequate and infrastructure was not capable of handling such massive amounts of rain in most of the province, he said.

“It became very clear no one was prepared for a disaster of this magnitude,” he said. “Our flood warning system was severely inadequate ... and made it clear we’re going to have to replace vulnerable infrastructure across this country. It is going to cost a lot of money, but the costs of not doing anything are much more staggering.

“If disaster relief is not improved ... it will have legal and political consequences for generations to come.”

Most of the global warming problems caused over the past 50 years are human caused and it’s up to humanity to turn the tide, he said.

“We’ve changed our climate and we have to live with the results,” he said.

Effective and consistent management of major watercourses is the best way of controlling global warming, he said.

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Osoyoos Times