

## Supporting climate adaptation needs to spread ‘like wildfire’

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The unanticipated, record heatwave in France in August 2003 was responsible for over 14,000 excess deaths. France has experienced even higher temperatures since then, but its 2004 National Heat Wave Plan meant that mortality has been reduced by adaptations including better warning messages, heat reflective surfaces, housing insulation, safe cooling spaces and shade trees in parks. In England “the possibilities for policy” [1] have had a lower priority, and in 2022 the hottest days in England were associated with an estimated 4,507 deaths [2]. The heatwave season of 2022 served as a warning that England and the rest of the UK are not ready to respond adequately to such extreme heat events [3].

English resources for adaptation are constrained by shrinking local authority funding (e.g. Birmingham, the second largest city, recently became insolvent). However, the biggest brake on action is the difficulty most people find in responding to a gradual, cumulative crisis. E.M. Forster described this fatal inaction vividly in his story *The Machine Stops* [4]. The Adverse Weather and Health Plan (AWHP) is the principal policy framework for England’s heat response and builds on the previous Heatwave Plan for England (HPE) and Cold Weather Plan for England. The National Adaptation Programme is now in its third iteration [5] but “each of the identified climate risks” is dealt with in isolation from the other risks. In the summer of 2022, wildfires broke out in many sites around London, almost overwhelming fire and rescue services, and rural drought interfered with harvests and tourism [6]. The UK endured very limited fires in 2022 compared to Canada. Over 400 fires not only devastated forests but created respiratory disease over a vast area, including the USA [7]. Heat risks relate to inter-linked problems: recently Greece authorities described a heartbreaking sequence of fires and floods. The most deadly flood in the Mediterranean area was linked to damaged infrastructure such as dams, roads and docks.[8]

Like climate risks, adaptive actions are often linked and can lead to co-benefits [9]. For example, Nature-based Measures were recommended for the future preparedness for heat risks [3]. Greening urban areas of London not only provided shade that was used by local people, it improved mental wellbeing, re-introduced wildlife and ultimately can reduce emissions.[10]

### References

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### Competing interests

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