

Climate Change in Guyana

We are pleased to present our findings from studies conducted at several locations on the coastal areas of Guyana, South America.

Observational studies were conducted of some of Guyana's coastal areas to ascertain the sea defence mechanisms in place and how effective it is in protecting these areas during high tides. These studies were conducted in the light of Climate Change and the effects it is having on the global environment. However, these recent changes are different because they are taking place faster and are unlikely to be reversed by natural processes.

Climate Change is affecting each one of us, sometimes in small insidious ways. Residents in some tropical islands of the Caribbean are noticing that the dry seasons are lasting longer each year. Small changes, yes, but they affect how we live our lives.

Some of us in Guyana thought that we were safe since we do not have hurricanes and tornadoes but we do experience other natural disasters such as floods, a few earth tremors, and the tail ends from the numerous hurricanes in the Caribbean. In 2005 Guyana experienced a major flood disaster; the last of its kind was recorded fifty (50) years. The forces from the waves were so strong that the waves overtopped the seawalls resulting in the coastal areas being flooded for weeks.

The floods of 2005 proved very destructive on the East Coast Corridor since many of the villages were flooded and flood waters in some cases were in excess of four (4) feet high. Studies have shown that irresponsible disposal of waste was responsible for the prolonged flood waters on the land since many of the drains and trenches were either clogged with debris or clogged from siltation. Hope Beach which is frequented by picnickers is a dumping ground for all types of plastic waste (bottles, bags) tins and boxes). Visitors to the beach would dispose of their waste by throwing them into the water or leaving them on the sea shore and the water would wash them out into the Atlantic Ocean. However, every time the water washes in, garbage that has been disposed by the visitors and at various other locations would wash up along the beach.

In an Inconvenient Truth, Al Gore also stated that in 2005 fifteen (15) new viruses were discovered or manifested; among them was 'Leptospirosis'. In Guyana during the flooding incidence more than 200 persons became sick by 'Leptospirosis' and approximately thirty (30) persons died as a result of the illness.

Three years after that disaster people still have not fully comprehended that their actions and attitudes were responsible for the flooding of 2005 and continue to dispose of their garbage in an irresponsible manner.

Climate Change though a frequently touted phrase is not fully understood by the average Guyanese and the impact that it can have on their lives has not been fully comprehended. Should we panic? No, but we should listen, learn, and try to understand but most importantly begin to adapt to Climate Change now. More emphasis needs to be placed on sensitizing the public on the importance and impact that Climate Change will have on the lives of people, the society and more importantly the environment. However, since it is easier to inculcate change in children rather than adults, awareness should begin with children from Nursery School onwards who are more likely to start the implementation process as against adults who are more resistant to change since they are already fixed in their ways.

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Guyana's sea walls and coastal defences are failing due to increased storms, coastal erosion, rise in sea level and lack of maintenance leading to increases in large scale flooding