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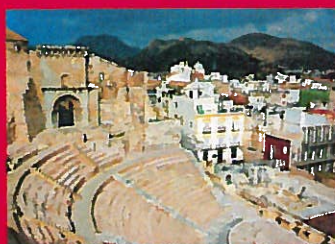
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# Climate change is an age issue

As climate change reportedly worsens, **Louise Duffield** examines the effect on the older generation and talks to those who are working to minimise its impact

**O**LDER PEOPLE are particularly vulnerable to climate and environmental change. In general, they are more at risk through extreme hot or cold weather... both of which are expected to increase in frequency.

The heatwave in the UK in 2003, for example, led to a short-term increase in deaths, with people over 75 worst affected.

Recent natural disasters have also highlighted the vulnerability of the older generation in other parts of the world. The majority of deaths from the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 occurred among older people.

Nearly 25 per cent of the world's population is expected to be over 55 by 2050, according to UN predictions, so the challenges are likely to grow.

A report earlier this year from an international consortium led by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) at the University of York and Simon Fraser University's Gerontology Research Centre, and including the Community Service Volunteers' Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP), highlighted the need to raise awareness of

the effects of a changing environment on older people across the world.

Dr Gary Haq, senior research associate at SEI at York, says: "Our study shows that older people are particularly vulnerable to environmental change – but awareness among policy-makers and older people is lagging behind. There is an urgent need for policy makers to better understand the interaction between global ageing and the environment to prevent and minimise disproportionate negative impacts on older people."

The report calls for policies to encourage older people to reduce their personal contribution to environmental change and



## Climate Week 2014

Climate Week aims to focus on the positive steps already being taken to protect the planet and combat global warming. It's the chance to reaffirm commitment to creating a sustainable future, and to inspire others to join the campaign.

During this year's Climate Week in March, thousands of schools, businesses, community groups, councils and individuals took part. More than 3500 events were held, and it was hailed as Britain's biggest-ever environmental occasion.

Celebrity supporters included Sir Paul McCartney, Sir Tom Jones, TV chef Raymond Blanc and actress Zoë Wanamaker.

Plans are already in place for Climate Week 2014, from March 3 to March 9.



to protect them from environmental threats.

It would like to see the environmental footprint of the ageing global population reduced by promoting greener attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle choices. Examples of this could be centred on ensuring homes are well insulated, which can also save on fuel bills, or using more fuel-efficient cars or public transport, it suggests.

The report also calls for more protection of older people from environmental change. In developing countries, lack of basic infrastructure such as clean water and sanitation, health and social care combined with poverty and malnutrition make them vulnerable to environmental threats.

Thirdly, the report encourages the mobilisation of older people in environmental protection by encouraging them to take part in environmental volunteering and making the most of their local knowledge of past environmental change.

The results of a pilot international survey of older people's attitudes suggest they are concerned about the environment, the threat of climate change and energy and water security, says the report. They are pessimistic about the state of the planet that future generations will inherit, believing environmental challenges will have grown significantly by 2050.

Professor Gloria Gutman, research associate at Simon Fraser University's Gerontology Research Centre, says: "Older people themselves, and especially those with chronic illnesses, need to recognise that environmental change can affect them personally. Data from around the world show that weather-related disasters kill older people at a disproportionate rate."

However, not all surveys have reported that the older generation is concerned about the environment.

A report on perceptions of climate change in Wales found that older and younger age groups tend to be least concerned about the effects of climate change, with older people least likely to

## Willersley House: Climate Week quiz

### "It helped save our green and pleasant land for future generations"

Willersley House in Hull, run by care, accommodation and support services charity MHA, organised a range of activities for Climate Week 2013.

These included a climate quiz with cheese and wine party for residents, staff and relatives, and a craft class with residents - making long-life shopping bags from old curtains. These were sold on at an in-house auction, with money going towards the home's amenities fund.

Residents also watched and discussed climate-themed films, held a themed sing-along, and focused on cooking with Climate Week cuisine, using leftovers to create bread-and-butter pudding, bubble and squeak, golden vegetable soup, and uncooked chocolate cake using broken biscuits.

Anna Lovett, activities co-ordinator, says: "I received inspiration in many ways. Initially I was inspired by the communication from MHA, and was then encouraged to talk to residents and staff and ideas were forthcoming from these conversations. I also found lots of ideas by surfing the web.

"As ever at Willersley House, we worked as a team and tried to produce the best we could. I was very proud to be a part of such an event as this is a really important topic for us today. I also feel proud on behalf of



all the staff and residents at Willersley House who contributed so much."

The residents enjoyed the activities.

Nancy Card, 94, says: "I joined in the baking session, making cakes. It was a wonderful idea to save all our broken biscuits and make them into chocolate cake. It was easy to do, it was crunchy, delicious and 'moreish'. It reduced waste and helped us to save our green and pleasant land for future generations."

Another resident, Sadie Cole, 94, says: "I enjoyed watching Anna making the bags. The sound of the sewing machine brought back memories of using my treadle machine and then I went on to an electric model. I recycled my wedding dress in 1942 to make underslips out of it.

"I think it is an excellent idea to recycle old things to give them new life. I now have a lovely bag that I use for laundry. I've been looking for one for a long time."



Residents cooked up some climate-friendly treats



express a willingness to change their behaviour to help combat climate change. Older people aged 75 or over were less likely to consider that the climate was changing (79 per cent of respondents) than were 35 to 44-year-olds (93 per cent of respondents).

The study at the end of 2012 also found that older people were less inclined to state they would be prepared to change their behaviour to help limit climate change than were middle-aged or young people. It was funded by the Climate Change Consortium of Wales and the Welsh Government, and involved researchers from the School of Psychology at Cardiff University and the Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University.

Dr Haq says attitudes to climate

change among the older generation vary, just as they do among the population in general.

They can range from concern about the planet which future generations and their grandchildren will inherit to awareness that the climate is changing but a belief this is down to natural causes and there is not much that can be done about it, he says.

"This group tends to see the measures proposed by government as being costly and limiting individual freedom," adds Dr Haq.

There is also a group that's unconcerned.

"They have their own life challenges to address, for example ill health, poor mobility, and the issue of climate change is not important to them. For some, they will not be around anyway so why should

**"Our study shows older people are particularly vulnerable to environmental change – but awareness among policy-makers and older people is lagging behind"**

Dr Gary Haq of Stockholm Environment Institute



they care?" There are others who are concerned about the issue but are not willing to change their behaviour and lifestyle choices, such as international air travel and car use. Others believe the government should do more, and revolutionary changes are required which are above and beyond what any individual can do, he adds.

There is some evidence that 'baby boomers' (those in their fifties and sixties) have the highest carbon footprint in the UK compared with other groups because this is the first generation of a consumer society that is entering older age.

According to Dr Haq, everyone has a role to play to reduce their impact on the environment.

"However, older people, especially those on fixed incomes and vulnerable to energy poverty, can benefit from taking energy-saving measures in the home, for example better insulated homes, monitoring energy use, and use of energy-efficient appliances and bulbs," he says.

"While it may not always be possible due to mobility issues, maximising use of public transport can reduce transport

## Homestead: Composter is a 'character'

### "It's quite a talking point with residents"

An Oxfordshire care home is introducing a novelty composter to help recycle kitchen waste after taking part in Climate Week 2013.

The Roly pig composter at Homestead in Carterton, Oxfordshire, will be fed waste such as tea bags and vegetable peelings which will create compost to be spread on the garden of the MHA home.

Manager Caroline Anderson says: "We discussed Climate Week at a monthly meeting with the team and what we could do. 'Roly' was one idea; we have ordered him and he will arrive soon. When we shared the idea with residents, it was quite exciting. You put waste in him, roll it; when his tail sticks up, it's ready to compost. It's quite a talking point with residents!"

It was the younger generation that suggested the idea, however.

"My daughter had been doing a project at school and she'd heard of Roly; it was her suggestion," says Caroline. "I was tickled with the idea, and looked it up online."

"She's now 13; this was a couple of years ago but I remembered it. He's due to arrive in the summer, date to be confirmed."

Now the residents of the home are looking forward to getting stuck in with their recycling project.

"We'll put in potato peelings every day – we have 68 residents so that's a lot of potatoes, and also tea bags. We'll set out waste buckets to collect the things we can use. We have a raised flowerbed and grow our own herbs, so the compost will be useful for the garden."

costs and emissions.

"Finally, many older people may live in large houses which are difficult to maintain or upgrade, so downsizing to smaller, energy-efficient homes may be more beneficial to save on energy bills and carbon emissions."

Care, accommodation and support services charity MHA showed its commitment to environmental issues earlier this year by taking part in Climate Week. A wide range of activities took place across the group, with residents and staff



responding enthusiastically, says Melanie Shreeve, director of estates at MHA.

"Awareness about the environment is of interest to every generation; it affects us all. If it doesn't affect us directly, it could still affect our loved ones in the future," she says.

"In a lot of ways, it's about bringing things round full circle. A lot of the ideas being promoted, about reusing materials and resources and finding ways to minimise waste, are the things older people used to do when they were younger. Many older people used to grow their own vegetables, walk rather than use a car, make things out of old curtains. They didn't use as much electricity because there were fewer labour-saving devices. They did their bit for the environment when they were younger.

"Everyone is very financially aware these days. For older people who do not have much money in their pocket, it can be very useful to find out ways to reduce waste. But as well as saving money, I also wanted the focus of the events to be on the environment. That's why we offered the prizes. Each of the winners got a mobile raised planting bed with six planting pods, and two additional fixed raised planters, to grow their own flowers, vegetables and herbs."

She was delighted with the enthusiasm of participants.

"I was very impressed with the response and how the homes really embraced the whole issue. I hear that many of the ideas

## Coed Craig: Focus on food efficiency

Residential care home Coed Craig in Colwyn Bay, Conwy, turned the spotlight on food waste during Climate Week. The care home, run by charity MHA, has around 45 residents.

Cook Vivienne Mawhinney says: "We were working towards a minimum of waste, so we found ways to use the extra food that was prepared for main meals. For example, we served salmon and then salmon and potato fishcakes later so the fish wasn't wasted. There was honey roast gammon, which also went into sandwiches and Spanish omelette. When we had extra mashed potatoes, we added it to soup to thicken it.

**"We were working towards a minimum of waste"**

"Anything we used for the main meal would later go towards tea or sandwiches. It was done very well and the residents really enjoyed it. You could tell by the clean plates."

As well as being more efficient, making good use of food helps the care home to remain in budget.

"That way, we can save money for Christmas and special occasions, like birthdays, and treat the residents to a real spread on those days while still staying within our costs," adds Vivienne. "We really love celebrating birthdays, especially centenarian ones. We'll get a birthday cake specially made so we can have it expertly decorated, but we'll have other cakes, quiche, sausage rolls and so on home-made here."

generated during the week on sustainability have been carried on afterwards which is what we hoped would happen.

"We had people doing the Climate Week quiz, finding new ways of making locally sourced and delicious, nutritious meals with minimal waste, arranging informative talks, finding new ways of using old things.

"Aldersgate in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, held a swap-shop for people to exchange their old clothes, books, CDs and DVDs with each other, and one of our winners, Willersley House in Hull, made shopping bags out of old curtains. That's resourcefulness. And, of course, these were fun activities for residents."

The Met Office website explains how our atmosphere stops that from happening. Certain gases in the atmosphere allow sunlight to pass through, but then stop the heat from escaping back out into space – much like glass in a greenhouse. That's why this is called the greenhouse effect, and why the gases responsible (water vapour, CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and others) are called greenhouse gases.

The heat-trapping effects of greenhouse gases were first explained by scientists more than 150 years ago.

## What is climate?

Weather is the temperature, wind and precipitation, which changes from hour to hour and day by day. Climate is the average weather over a much longer period.

According to the UK's national weather service, the Met Office, climate is dominated by two major factors – the sun and the atmosphere, which is made of various gases. The sun heats the earth but without the atmosphere it would be given off as infrared radiation by the earth and it would virtually all go back out to space – leaving us very cold.

## Find out more

■ For more information from the Met Office about climate and climate change, see the website:

([www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate-change](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate-change))

■ Climate Week is the UK's biggest climate change campaign, website: ([www.climateweek.com](http://www.climateweek.com))

■ MHA provides a range of services to 16,000 older people: 5000 living in care homes – residential, nursing and specialist dementia care; 2000 living independently in a range of purpose-built apartments with flexible support and personalised care; and 9000 supported via live at home services in the community. For information, tel: 01332 296200, website: ([www.mha.org.uk](http://www.mha.org.uk)).

