

Adapting to Climate Change & Sea Level Rise, 2014

Communication Considerations

1. Help Marylanders recognize the current and future effects of sea level rise to the state

A majority of residents admit that they don't know whether sea-level rise is currently happening along Maryland's shorelines, even though the state is one of those most at risk. When coastal flooding and storm events occur use these windows of opportunity to draw the connection to rising sea levels and the increasing severity of these incidences over time.

2. Cause is important: Emphasize that we may not be able to reverse sea-level rise, but we can slow our contributions to it

More than a third of state residents (36%) say they don't know what is causing sea levels to rise – whether it is from natural causes or human activities. Another 17% say it is mostly a natural phenomenon. Emphasize that we may not have the ability to stop sea-level rise in the near term, but we have the ability to choose whether we make the warming that causes it even worse.

3. Promote protection of natural resources and habitats as necessary to community protection

Using government funds to buy natural areas as buffers against rising waters and storms (55%) is supported by the majority of Marylanders somewhat more than building shoreline walls and structural barriers as protection (48%). Promote the link between healthy natural ecosystems and human communities for all manner of climate adaptation activities – from coastal protection to stormwater management.

4. Climate change looks different depending on where you live; point to local changes

Recognizing the effects of climate change can be difficult because it manifests in so many ways. Hotter weather and more severe storms are mentioned the most frequently as likely impacts from climate change that will occur in Marylanders' communities in the next 10-20 years. What aren't as well known are more localized impacts like the warming of cold-water streams in Western Maryland, or higher storm surges in coastal regions.

5. Promote conversations about how climate change affects agriculture and public health

Marylanders are most concerned about how climate change will harm agriculture and public health. Start discussions about what climate change will mean to their health and the state's farming communities and what they can do to protect themselves and their local food supply.

Additional resources to visualize climate impacts in Maryland:

- Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources Climate Change Impact Area Mapper: <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/climatechange/mapper.asp>
- NOAA's sea level rise and coastal flooding impacts viewer: <http://csc.noaa.gov/slr/viewer/>