Climate Change & Community Safety

How our changing environment might influence our safety

Scottish Community Safety Network

Introduction

In light of COP26 and the impact of climate change becoming ever more apparent across Scotland and the UK, the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN) facilitated a workshop to identify how climate change might affect community safety.

Over 30 people attended from a spectrum of community safety organisations including representatives from RoSPA, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Community Safety Partnership Leads, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Neighbourhood Watch Scotland and the Scottish Flood Forum.

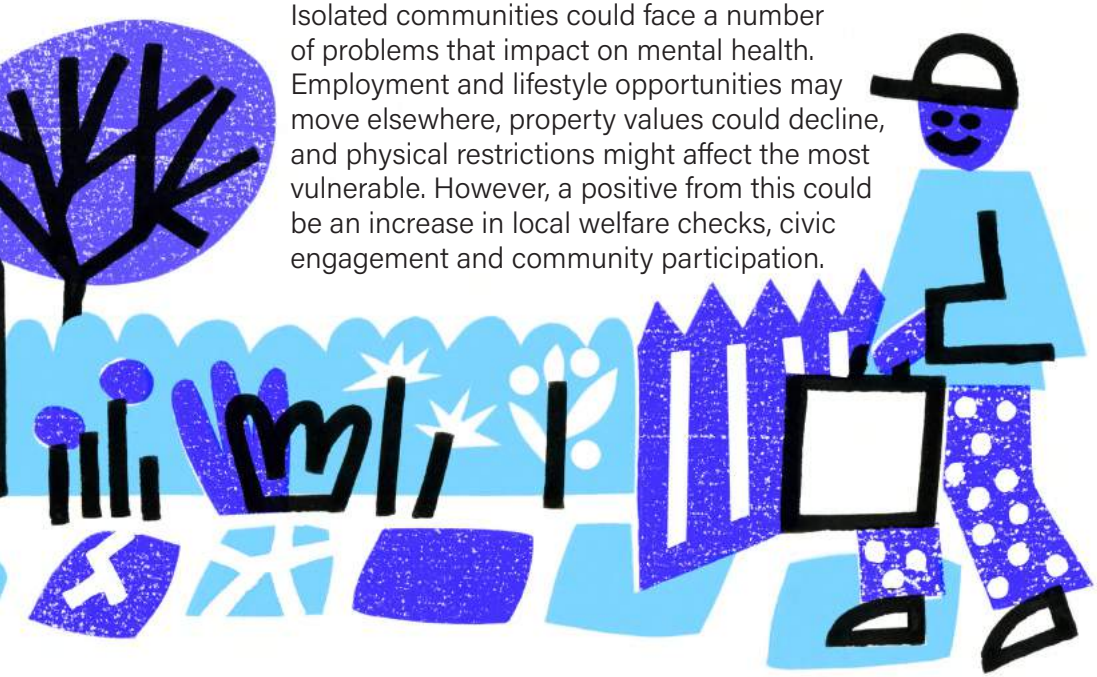
Five key impacts of climate change were identified: **Rainfall and Flooding, Heatwaves, Coastal Erosion, Pests and Invasive and Non-Native Species (INNS)** and **Extreme Weather**. Each were discussed in relation to three areas of safety: **Home**, **Outdoor** and **Personal**, which are colour-coded respectively throughout.

1. Rainfall and Flooding

Fast-flowing floods and debris pose a threat to life as well as damaging infrastructure and farmland. Flooded roads can cut off communities, hindering access for the emergency services. Electrocution and pressure on drains is also more likely.

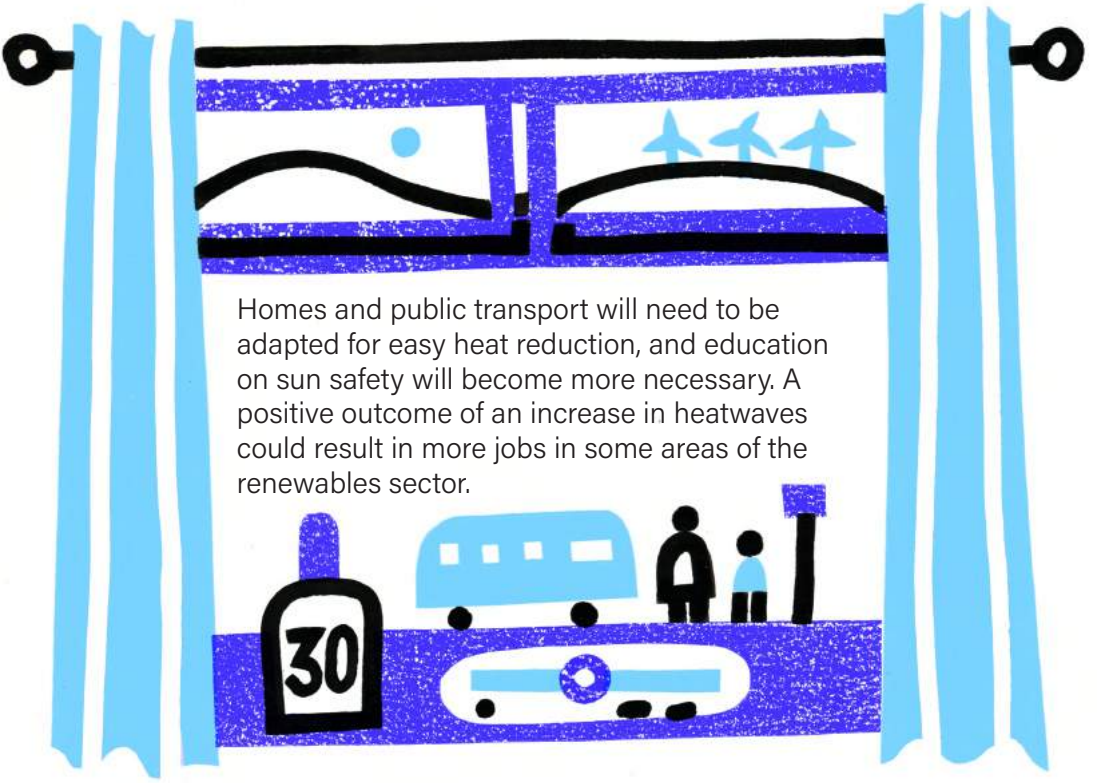
Flooding in homes causes immediate physical danger and water contamination. Long-term damp can cause health issues as well as structural damage which in turn affect insurance costs. More DIY projects and power cuts could increase accidents and candle fires.

Isolated communities could face a number of problems that impact on mental health. Employment and lifestyle opportunities may move elsewhere, property values could decline, and physical restrictions might affect the most vulnerable. However, a positive from this could be an increase in local welfare checks, civic engagement and community participation.



2. Heatwaves

Heatwaves cause water scarcity and wildfires, which can result in death and unintentional harm to people and wildlife. Water-based accidents are also of concern as well as overcrowding of natural beauty spots leading to littering. Heatwaves also damage infrastructure which can affect transport, access and utilities.



Homes and public transport will need to be adapted for easy heat reduction, and education on sun safety will become more necessary. A positive outcome of an increase in heatwaves could result in more jobs in some areas of the renewables sector.

Most homes in the UK are not designed for hotter weather so will overheat and urban areas will experience Heat Island Effect. Again, an increase in DIY projects to adapt houses, plus more time spent in gardens could lead to more heat exposure and accidents.

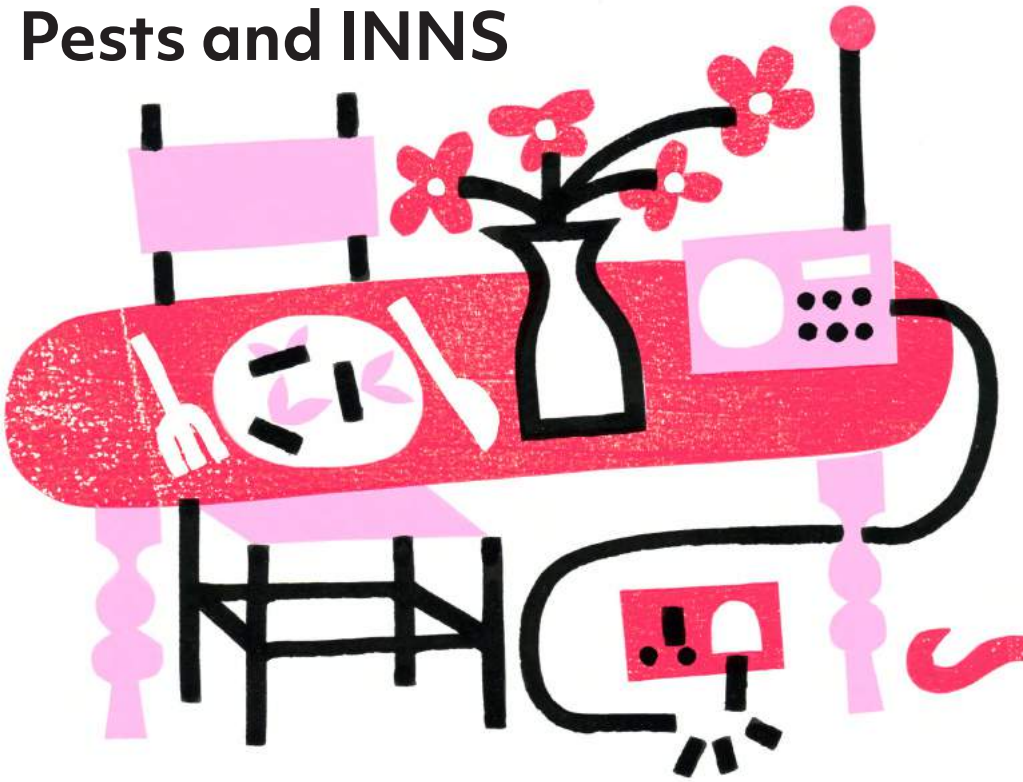
3. Coastal Erosion

Mental health could be adversely affected because of safety worries, home values and displacement. A future socio-economic split could occur between areas in danger of coastal erosion and those not, with opportunities and funding more likely to go to 'safe' areas.

There is an immediate physical danger of floods and landslips, as well as damage to utilities, drainage and roads. Lost beauty spots could reduce tourism and income for local economies and result in a more dangerous, less managed landscape.

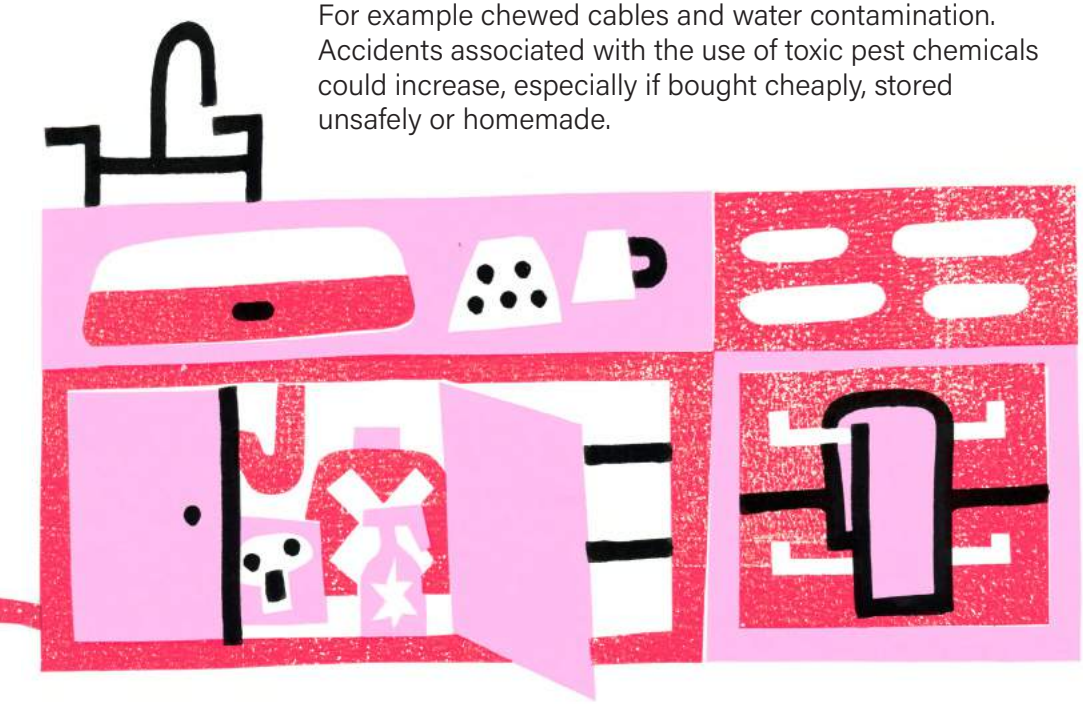
Homes in areas at risk of coastal erosion are likely to become increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain, insure and sell on. Owners of holiday homes could see these changes happen more abruptly as they may visit their properties infrequently, and should be prepared for this.

4. Pests and INNS



Stings, allergies and the spread of new viruses could become more likely. Changes to the ecosystem might attract new predators. An increased need for waste management and pest control would put pressure on local councils.

Infestations can damage properties and gardens. For example chewed cables and water contamination. Accidents associated with the use of toxic pest chemicals could increase, especially if bought cheaply, stored unsafely or homemade.



Stress caused by pests, and a reluctance to spend time outside, may impact on public mental health. This could put pressure on local health services, as well as on businesses and tourism.

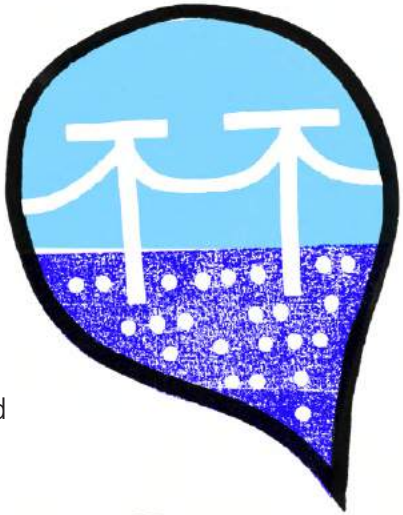
5. Extreme Weather

As well as dangerous weather or heatwaves, climate change could lead to more frequent cold spells, resulting in increased cases of hyperthermia and fuel poverty. Loss of utilities could also become more common in extreme climates.

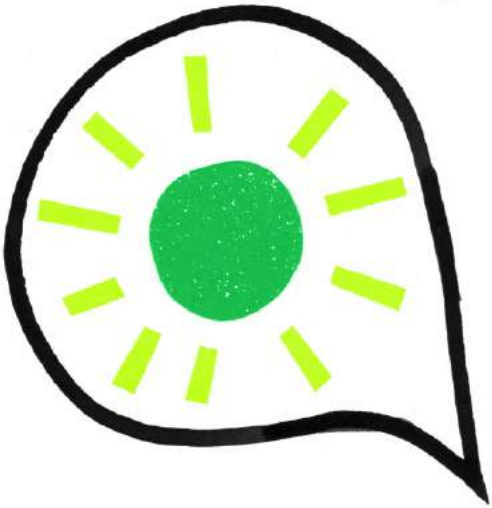
Extreme weather could also include strong winds, sea-surges and lightning. Sudden changes in the weather may catch people off guard and ill-prepared, causing increases in injuries and fatalities.

Employability, investment and mental health would all be affected, and put strain on the wellbeing of communities. Other problems such as looting and dependence on alcohol or substances may also rise.

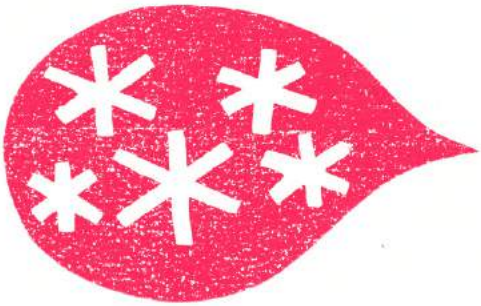
Conclusion



The information in this report was co-produced with community safety professionals from across Scotland. The question now is: what do community safety practitioners do about the projected impact of climate change, and what can you do locally?



The key message from SCSN is that it is up to those working within each local area, and those with local knowledge, to understand these risks, their impacts, to prepare and influence change. This can be done personally and professionally, aiming to involve others and starting conversations about climate change, with community safety as the focus.



For example, new community safety strategic documents should include discussions of climate change, and risk assessments should include the impacts listed, though these are not exhaustive. Climate change is everybody's responsibility.

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Commissioned by SCSN
Printed on recycled paper

Illustration and design
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