

Local Responses to a Global Problem: How the Police Can Improve Planning and Preparation for the Consequences of Climate Change

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Source article

Lydon, D., Hallenberg, K., and Kapageorgiadou, V. (2024). 'This is not a drill': Police and partnership preparedness for consequences of the climate crisis. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*. [Online first]. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14613557241248295>

Take home messages

- Practitioners and leaders from strategic, tactical, and operational levels of emergency and contingency planning highlighted four key areas of concern: awareness of climate change impacts, why the police should care, levels of prioritization and preparation, and enabling and impeding factors to preparedness.
- Challenges were identified for effective planning and preparedness including: a narrow focus on legal requirements and specified climate-related risks (e.g., flooding and drought), short-term planning cycles (4-5 years), lack of funding and resources, and inadequate strategic vision and leadership.
- Recommendations: review and redefine planning parameters, enhance central government engagement, increase awareness of the scope of climate-related threats, prioritize future-oriented thinking and leadership, consider ethical implications for communities, and engage in collaborative planning and scenario testing on broader climate-related threats.

Why did researchers conduct the study?

Research into police planning and preparation for the consequences of climate change is sparse. These potential consequences pose significant risks to society, threatening to overwhelm emergency services and their partners, who face both acute and chronic challenges from the combined and cumulative effects of climate-related phenomena (sometimes called 'cascading' risks). Immediate threats like flooding, drought and extreme weather events are often planned for. However, others such as public health crises, fuel, energy, and food insecurity, and growing vulnerable populations are less considered. The [source article](#) assesses the preparedness of the UK police and their partners for the consequences of climate change, aiming to identify gaps and provide recommendations for improvement. The research has implications for policy and professional practice in other global jurisdictions seeking to develop their risk assessment processes, contingency planning, and preparedness.

How did the researchers conduct the study?

The study involved interviews with 13 participants from the police and their partners. Interviewees were drawn from professional experts at strategic, tactical, and operational levels from various organizations involved in risk assessment, contingency planning, and emergency response (e.g., police services, local government authorities, government agencies, the military and specialist contractors). They represented urban, rural, and coastal areas of responsibility across the UK.

What did the researchers find?

The following four key areas of concern were identified:

1. Awareness of climate change impacts

There is widespread awareness and planning about emergency responses to flooding, drought, and extreme weather events. However, concerns exist about the lack of awareness and planning for cascading risks and issues such as public health crises; fuel, energy, and food insecurity; national security conflicts; organized crime; growing vulnerable populations; forced migration; social unrest; and chronic infrastructure degradation. Where practitioners had knowledge of such risks, they expressed that they could not act to plan and prepare due to limited resources and funding, the result being that many focused on what must minimally be done according to legal or government directives.

2. Why the police should care

The police identified that they may need to manage more widespread protests and civil disobedience related to climate change and its impacts on local communities. Climate impacts like resource scarcity and displaced populations could strain community relations, requiring police intervention. It was acknowledged that police capacity and workforce well-being may be compromised during such events, should they become normalized in society. Moreover, perceptions of police legitimacy could be affected by their responses to climate issues, impacting public trust and confidence.

3. Levels of prioritization and preparation

There was a lack of localized planning for consequences beyond the immediate threats listed above. Planning typically focused on short-term risks over 4–5-year cycles, neglecting long-term climate change effects. In part, central government leadership and strategic vision are lacking, leading to under-funding and poor guidance on risk assessment and planning priorities for local agencies.

4. Enabling and impeding factors to preparedness

Partnerships with experts and academia were suggested to enhance knowledge and awareness to inform preparedness through knowledge exchange and evidence-based practices. Consistent national planning templates for risk assessment could improve threat and response assessment and regional collaboration. Scenario testing for diverse climate change consequences was identified as crucial to future success. Resource constraints and a lack of senior leadership were identified as obstacles to planning and preparation.

In summary, the [source article](#) concludes that the police are not fully prepared for the range of challenges posed by climate change beyond immediate threats like flooding, drought, and extreme weather events.

How can the police use these findings?

The [source article](#) provides six recommendations aimed at improving preparedness.

1. Broaden planning horizons

In addition to focusing on immediate threats, consider long-term, cascading effects such as public health crises, resource scarcity, national security conflicts, organized crime, and infrastructure degradation. Revise risk assessments and the timescale of planning cycles to account for these threats.

2. Strengthen central government leadership

Adopt a more expansive view of potential climate change consequences, offering detailed guidance and increased resources for local areas. Commit to addressing the root causes of climate change as well as its effects.

3. Improve knowledge exchange

Enhance awareness and understanding of global strategic analyses within the police and partnership planning communities, to better grasp the range and scope of climate-related threats. This knowledge would feed into risk assessment and contingency planning.

4. Develop future-oriented thinking in police leadership

Emphasize the significance of preparing for climate change consequences within a police science and technology context. Senior police leaders should take a longer-term view, extending beyond their own tenure and consider establishing coordination committees to provide strategic direction at local and national levels.

5. Address ethical considerations

Ensure that policing services can be distributed equitably, especially to vulnerable communities who may be disproportionately affected by climate change consequences. This approach may help maintain public trust and cooperation, vital to sustaining police legitimacy.

6. Foster collaborative preparedness

Develop and engage in a collaborative approach to planning and preparation, involving professional practitioners (not necessarily from policing), academia, public sector, and private entities. Develop and test plans for a much broader range of scenarios beyond the commonly identified threats.

References

1. Lydon, D., Hallenberg, K., and Kapageorgiadou, V. (2024). 'This is not a drill': Police and partnership preparedness for consequences of the climate crisis. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*. [Online first]. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14613557241248295>