

Climate Change – Why Golf Should Care

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The great majority of scientists, politicians and the public now agree that climate change is real, is happening now and is caused by human beings. We can never link a single event to man-made changes in the global climate, but the science is clear. We are living in an ever warmer world with changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events of the kind that we see more and more of on the news.

The UK is not immune to these changes. Nine of our ten hottest years on record have occurred since 1990. Spring arrives 11 days earlier and average temperatures have risen by 1°C since the 1970s. They will increase by another 2 to 5°C by 2100, much more in summer. Sea levels around our coast have risen by 10cm since 1900 and may rise by a further metre by 2100. The 2007 floods caused damage estimated at £3 billion and episodes of flash flooding will increase. On average though, summer rainfall is falling and the Met Office predicts more droughts. Maps available from the [UK Climate Impacts Programme](#) will be used to illustrate these trends.

These changes will affect all of us, and the consequences for golf are many and varied (*insert pics*). Increased flooding will make some holes or courses unplayable at times, and nutrients will be more likely to get washed away by heavy rain. Vulnerable areas will be more susceptible to erosion, particularly at the coast when combined with sea level rise. Indeed, many links courses have already lost entire holes to the sea. There will be increased competition for water around the country, but especially during warm spells and in the drier south east, meaning less water will be available when it is most needed, and at a higher cost. New diseases and non-native pests will encroach into more of the country, able to withstand milder winters.

Many sectors are already taking action. Parts of the tourism and leisure industry are planning for these changes, yet the golf world has generally been slow to understand the implications and act accordingly. Drainage systems may need to be rethought and redesigned. Clubs will need to use water much more efficiently and perhaps recycle water. New strains of grass may be required and players at all levels will need to get used to the changing conditions.

It is not all doom and gloom. Climate change also brings benefits and opportunities. An extended playing season means golf will be possible in parts of the country and at times of the year where it has not previously been so. This will mean millions of extra rounds every year.

The government recognises the risks and is keen to ensure the UK plays its part in reducing global greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change and at the same time plans for the inevitable consequences. A whole range of organisations, including schools and hospitals, are already required to report and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions or to prepare plans to understand and plan for the impacts of climate change. In time, golf courses and even individuals may have to take similar measures. As usual, those who take early action will be best placed to cope with the changes.