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Life in Hampton Roads: Local Residents Concerned About Sea Level Rise and Flood Risks

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This report examines regional measures of environmental risk perceptions from the 2018 Life In Hampton Roads survey (LIHR 2018) conducted by the Old Dominion University Social Science Research Center (SSRC). Data from prior years is also provided when available to show comparisons in responses. Responses were weighted by city population, race, age, gender and phone usage (cell versus land-line) to be representative of Hampton Roads. For additional information on survey methodology, and analyses of other issues, please see the SSRC website at www.odu.edu/ssrc (<http://www.odu.edu/ssrc>).



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The survey included questions to determine how people in Hampton Roads felt about sea level rise and flooding, which supports a research focus of the University.

Sea Level Rise, Flooding, and Flood Risks

Respondents were asked whether they believe flooding in Hampton Roads has increased, decreased or stayed the same in the past 30 years. The overwhelming majority (86.9 percent) stated that flooding has

either increased (63.0 percent) or stayed the same (23.9 percent). Only 3.9 percent stated that flooding has decreased and 9.2 percent said that they did not know or refused to answer.

Responses to this question have remained relatively consistent with the previous four years.

However, 2017 and '18 saw an increase in respondents stating that flooding has increased. In 2017, 60.4 percent of respondents reported that they believe flooding had increased, which was the highest percentage at that time. That was topped by 2.6 percentage points this year. Similarly, the 3.9 percent who believe flooding has decreased is the lowest percentage reported in the last five years.

Additionally, 71.1 percent indicated they were either very (38.4 percent) or somewhat concerned (32.7 percent) about flooding.

Neighborhood Flooding and Flood Insurance

Respondents also were asked whether recurrent flooding is a problem in their neighborhood. While 63.0 percent indicated that they think flooding has increased over the past 30 years, 65.1 percent reported that recurrent flooding is not a problem in their neighborhood. The 33.4 percent reporting that recurrent flooding is a problem is an increase of 2.4 percentage points over 2017.

There were significant differences between the cities in regards to the prevalence of recurrent flooding in neighborhoods. At the highest end, 58.8 percent of Norfolk residents and 56.5 percent of Portsmouth residents said it is a problem. At the other end of the spectrum, only 16.7 percent of Suffolk residents and 10.6 percent of Newport News residents said it is a problem.

Only 13.8 percent of respondents said they live in a high-risk flood zone as designated by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Another 10.5 percent did not know if they are in a high-risk flood zone.

Consistent with the past five years, 34.6 percent of respondents said they have flood insurance. Since 2014, this percentage has stayed between 33.1 percent (2017) and 37.4 percent (2015). Of those who have flood insurance, 63.4 percent said it is covered by a renter's or homeowner's policy. Another 29.6 percent said their flood insurance is covered by a

separate policy purchased from the National Flood Insurance Program.

Those who said they did not have flood insurance were asked why they chose not to purchase it. The most common response (62.9 percent) was that they were not required to or are not in a flood zone. Another 25.1 percent reported they do not think their property is at risk from flooding. Another 9.1 percent said it's too expensive.

Respondents were asked to identify how concerned they are that flood insurance rates will increase. The majority (59.7 percent) said they were either somewhat concerned (30.8 percent) or very concerned (28.9 percent). Conversely, 20.6 percent are not concerned and 17.5 percent are not very concerned.

Respondents were also asked to identify the percent chance (between 0 and 100) that Hampton Roads would be struck by a catastrophic hurricane within the next 10 years. The average percentage given across all respondents was a 57.8 percent chance of a catastrophic hurricane hitting. They were then asked: "If such an event did occur, what is the percent chance that your home would flood?" The average response was 39.1 percent chance. Finally, respondents were asked to identify the percent chance that their home would receive wind damage. The average response was a 56.6 percent chance.

In summary, the percentage of respondents reporting that flooding increased went up this year, yet just over one-third have flood insurance. Hampton Roads residents think on average that there is a greater than 50 percent chance of the region being struck by a catastrophic hurricane in the next 10 years and that their homes would sustain wind damage.

All Life in Hampton Roads Data Analyses will be placed on the Social Science Research Center website as they are released (<http://www.odu.edu/al/centers/ssrc> (<http://www.odu.edu/al/centers/ssrc>)). Follow-up questions about the 2018 Life in Hampton Roads survey should be addressed to:

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