Climate Change and Sea Level Rise: Delawareans say they are convinced and ready to act.

In 2014, Delaware residents were surveyed about their thoughts on climate change and sea level rise. Delawareans believe that climate change and sea level rise are happening and are a threat to our state. They think we should act now and they believe that their own actions make a difference.

Residents in Delaware believe climate change and sea level rise are happening and are a threat.

- 79% Are convinced that climate change is happening
- 70% Are convinced that sea level rise is happening

Delawareans think immediate action should be taken to reduce the impacts of climate change and sea level rise.

- 76% Say to act now on climate change
- 72% Say to act now on sea level rise

Residents support local and state governments spending more money on public construction projects if it means that the structures could withstand sea level rise.

- 70% Support
- 20% Oppose
- 10% Not Sure

Delawareans agree that they can personally take actions to reduce climate change.

- 65%

Delawareans support key strategies to respond to and prepare for sea level rise.

- 85% Change building codes and regulations to reduce risk in flood prone areas
- 71% Elevate buildings in areas of risk using private funding
- 77% Avoid building new structures in areas at risk from sea level rise
- 64% Allow beaches and wetlands to naturally migrate inland

The full report is available online at www.de.gov/climateslrsurvey
Climate change survey

Poll reveals 79 percent of Delawareans are convinced climate change is happening

An increasing majority of Delawareans are convinced that climate change and sea level rise are happening, and want immediate action to reduce their impacts, according to a 2014 survey conducted by Responsive Management, an independent public opinion firm.

The survey, co-funded by Delaware Sea Grant and the state of Delaware’s Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), polled 1,508 Delaware residents in New Castle, Kent and Sussex counties. It follows a 2009 DNREC-funded study to assess Delawareans’ general knowledge of climate change and sea level rise, and support for action.

In the 2014 survey, 79 percent of respondents said they are convinced that climate change is happening, up from 70 percent in 2009. Seventy percent believe that sea level rise is a reality, compared to 63 percent in 2009.

Three out of four respondents (76 percent) agree that immediate action should be taken to reduce the impacts of climate change and sea level rise.

“Climate change affects all of us — impacting our economy, environment, public health and safety,” said Gov. Jack Markell. “This survey confirms that a strong majority of Delawareans believe climate change is occurring, and we are committed to taking the key actions to reduce its impact — by improving the state’s resiliency, developing strategies for adaptation and preparedness and setting goals for greenhouse gas reductions.”

The survey also revealed that 79 percent of respondents agreed that climate change poses a serious threat. Those who agreed that climate change is a “very serious threat” increased considerably over the five-year period, from 38 percent in 2009 to 45 percent in 2014.

Support for Delaware initiatives

While environmental concerns ranked less important than other national issues such as the economy, crime, public education, and health care, the Delaware findings are in line with national statistics reported by the Pew Research Center, which indicate a growing number of U.S. adults — 72 percent — support the view that there is solid evidence that the Earth is warming, with almost half attributing the change to human activity.

The survey asked Delawareans about specific actions that could be taken to address sea level rise. Delawareans supported the following key initiatives to prepare for and respond to sea level rise:

- Changing building codes and regulations to reduce risk in flood prone areas (85 percent);
- Elevating buildings in at risk areas using private funding (71 percent);
- Increased funding for research (72 percent);
- Avoiding building new structures in at risk areas (77 percent);
- Allowing beaches and wetlands to naturally migrate inland (64 percent);
- Increased spending on projects aimed at sea level resiliency (70 percent).

When polled about whether individuals can personally take action to reduce climate change, a majority of residents, 65 percent, agreed.

“DNREC and Delaware Sea Grant have been working with citizens and community leaders throughout the state to increase their understanding of climate change and assist with on-the-ground efforts to address climate impacts,” said DNREC Secretary David Small. “The survey verifies what we have found—that more Delawareans are aware and knowledgeable about climate change and the need to take action now.”

Delaware Sea Grant efforts

Delaware Sea Grant (DESG), which is administered by the University of Delaware’s College of Earth, Ocean, and Environment (CDOE), works to provide communities and policy makers with sound science-based research to support initiatives related to the challenges associated with climate change.

Current DESG projects include, but are not limited to:

- Assisting communities to prepare for climate change and understand the key role local governments play in building resilience towards natural hazard and climate impacts through DESG’s resilient coastal communities initiative;
- Funding and support for real-time data products like the Coastal Flood Monitoring System and Delaware Environmental Observing System, which inform emergency managers and communities during weather and flood events;
- Conducting research and demonstration projects for salt-tolerant crops to withstand flooded agricultural fields, while providing a commercially viable alternative for farmers;
- Inspiring and supporting formal and informal climate change science education through the Maryland Delaware Climate Change Education, Assessment and Research (MAKE CLEAR) collaboration.

According to Nancy Targett, CDOE dean and director of the Delaware Sea Grant college program, fostering partnerships with the state and other agencies also aligns with UDO’s mission.

“We pride ourselves on working with DNREC and other state partners to provide scientific research that can inform policy decisions and support community education and outreach,” said Targett.

“It’s great to see the way Delawareans, our academic institutions and our state agencies have come together to tackle the challenges of climate change in Delaware.”

The full 2014 report, as well as the infographic depicting some of the study’s main findings, is available for download at www.de.gov/climateisurvey.

About Delaware Sea Grant

www.desegrant.org

The University of Delaware was designated as the nation’s ninth Sea Grant College in 1976 to promote the wise use, conservation and management of marine and coastal resources through high-quality research, education and outreach activities that serve the public and the environment.

Administered by UDO’s College of Earth, Ocean, and Environment, the Delaware Sea Grant college program conducts research in priority areas ranging from aquaculture to coastal hazards.

About DNREC

www.dnrec.delaware.gov

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control is the lead state agency for climate change initiatives. Its Delaware Coastal Programs Office led the Delaware Sea Level Rise Advisory Committee and development of sea level rise adaptation recommendations for the state.

The DNREC Division of Energy and Climate completed the Delaware Climate Impact Assessment and is leading efforts to address Gov. Markell’s Executive Order 41: Preparing Delaware for Emerging Climate Impacts, which includes setting greenhouse gas mitigation goals and adapting state policies and procedures to address climate change.