

Rain stopped play: Cost of climate change on sport

Generations of sports-lovers, whether participants or supporters, have been periodically affected by bad weather causing disruption on the field of play. Millions of cricket and tennis lovers will have frustrating memories of sitting hoping that the covers would be removed and play resumed.

Over the past decade the UK has been increasingly impacted by severe storms dumping huge amounts of rainfall making grass surfaces unplayable.

The winters of 2013/4 (<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/summaries/2014/winter>) and 2015/6 (<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/summaries/2016/winter>) saw record levels of rainfall deposited with winter 2014 exceptionally stormy with some 12 major storms affecting the UK in two spells from mid-December to early January and from late January-mid-February.

Storm Desmond on 5 December 2015 dumped 341.4 mm of rain in 24-hours, a new UK rainfall record.

Such intense rainfall has had a big impact on sport. Following the severe floods in winter 2014 JGFR research through GfK found that 1 in 5 of the public found the weather had affected their participation in sport during the winter. Among students nearly 1 in 3 were affected.

Regionally the impact was greatest in Northern Ireland (36% of adults) and the South West (31%).

Cricket is especially vulnerable to bad weather with increasing rainfall causing significant loss of fixtures in recreational cricket and impacting on the professional game.

The cost in terms of reduced participation and also in damage to facilities and lost revenue is substantial. Sport England in response to the winter storms of 2014 produced guidance and information on assessing and combating the risks of flooding and contingency planning (<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/tools-guidance/flood-guidance/>)

Damage by storms and flooding linked to climate change caused more than £3.5 million of damage across 57 cricket clubs in December 2015. Support to help fund rebuilding costs by the England & Wales Cricket Board was cited in a recent report highlighting the efforts by MCC to bring greater awareness of the impact of climate change on sport (<https://www.lords.org/news/2017/new-article-details/lords-goes-100-renewable/>).

One result of the disruptive winter weather has been much greater interest in all weather, multi-sport facilities, a trend set to grow and for the biggest stadia to incorporate a sliding roof.

A new subject area of research is emerging – the impact of climate change on sport and sports performance.

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