
Getting Coast Smart

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AC Resolution
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Climate change is expected to cause rising sea level, more frequent storm surges, coastal subsidence, changing patterns of rainfall (including drought), loss of fragile coastal wetlands, saltwater intrusion into agricultural areas and emergence of new diseases. It will require substantial expenditures to replace vulnerable infrastructure, build new physical barriers, shift inappropriate land uses to safer locations, guarantee water and food supplies, and ensure structures are built to appropriate standards. At-risk communities may also have to impose restrictions on individual landowners, deal with problems of uninsurability and beef up emergency preparedness and public health protocols.

Despite these potential threats, there are numerous barriers to taking corrective action. First, the extent and timing of these threats are hard to predict at the local level. Second, severe threats such as inundations mainly lie in the future, not right now. Many residents and officials do not see why they should worry about climate change when they face declining tax revenues, failing schools and potholes right now. Those who remain skeptical that climate change is happening at all reinforce this view. Finally, most of the media and policy focus to date has been on mitigation--how to reduce carbon emissions so that we can avoid a climate catastrophe--and not on adapting to the very real risks that coastal communities face.

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