

CELEBRATING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

By Paul Kovacs

This report celebrates communities across Canada that are adapting to reduce the risk of loss and damage from extreme weather. This includes reducing the risk of damage from flood, wildfire, severe wind, and other hazards. The Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction recognizes and commends the leadership evident in communities across the country working to get ahead of the growing risk of loss and damage from extreme weather.

Canada's climate is changing. Significant further change is coming. In many communities, change will include an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that will bring a growing risk of damage to public infrastructure and private property. Fortunately, action has begun in Canada to adapt current practices to better anticipate the impact of extreme weather. This report celebrates the leadership of local governments to help society adapt to extreme weather risks. The twenty case studies in this report illustrate successful actions taken by local leaders to confront the threat of extreme weather. These local actions are consistent with the views of the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction about the best extreme weather adaptation and risk reduction practices.

A comprehensive local plan to adapt to change in the climate should include actions to deal with a climate that is becoming wetter, warmer, and stormier in many locations. Previous Cities Adapt reports by the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction identified communities successfully adapting to an increase in extreme rainfall threatening urban flooding, and an increase in extreme heat threatening the health of Canadians. This report focuses on adapting to the threat of loss and damage from rivers flooding, coastal flooding, wildfire, tornado, hurricane, ice storms, avalanche, landslides, tsunami and other extreme weather hazards affected by change in the climate. The cases presented in this report identify specific adaptation and risk reduction actions that have been successfully implemented by local governments in Canada.

Extreme rainfall, heat, and weather will increasingly affect many communities across the country as a result of change in the climate. We are excited to identify and celebrate actions that have been successfully implemented by community leaders in Canada to adapt to these threats. We encourage local leaders to implement similar actions in your community. The identified actions are consistent with the Institute's views about best practices to reduce the risk of loss and damage from extreme events. We are confident that similar actions will benefit most communities.



Figure 1: *Canada's climate is changing. Significant further change is coming. In many communities, change will include an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that will bring a growing risk of damage to public infrastructure and private property. (Source: Town of Percé)*

The Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction is an international centre of excellence in disaster risk reduction. We are the oldest and largest university-based disaster research institute in Canada. The Institute is affiliated with Western University and has been a champion for building disaster resilient communities for more than 20 years. Core funding and support for the Institute is provided by Canada's insurance industry, an important leader in the promotion of disaster risk reduction research and outreach.

Preventable loss of life, injuries, and property damage due to disasters is unacceptably high. In 2015, Canada and more than 190 other countries that are members of the United Nations worked together to craft the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Framework sets out a detailed strategy to confront the risk of loss and damage from extreme events. The case studies presented in this report are all consistent with the four priorities for action set out in the Sendai Framework:

- Build back better in recovery
- Better understand disaster risk
- Strengthen disaster risk governance
- Invest in disaster risk reduction

Local governments across Canada are implementing actions consistent with the priorities for action set out in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Indeed, twenty examples are set out in this report. However, the loss and damage experienced in Canada due to extreme events has been rising at an alarming rate. Local leadership is welcome, but more action is urgently required. Much of the disaster damage expected in Canada is preventable through the application of existing risk reduction knowledge. There could be fewer lives lost, less destruction of homes and businesses, better protection of public infrastructure, and less disruption of local economies. Much of the anticipated damage from extreme weather can be avoided through a shift in mindset from preparing to respond when disaster strikes to one that also prioritizes investments in risk reduction, as demonstrated by the communities profiled in this report.

This report recognizes the leadership evident in communities across the country, but it is also a call for a significant increase in disaster risk reduction efforts. More action is needed by private industry, the federal government, and provincial governments. Moreover, while several local governments are leading the way, much more is needed at the local level. The most effective risk reduction and adaptation initiatives are typically led by local governments and private property owners, and Canada's record of rising disaster damage combined with change in the climate warns that local governments and property owners must do more. The Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction is pleased to celebrate the leadership evident in the case studies presented in this report and welcomes the opportunity to work with local leaders and other stakeholders across the country to consider actions that can be taken to build the resilience of your community to the growing threat of extreme weather.