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THE FORD GOVERNMENT

CLIMATE CRIME # 3 UPDATE JAN 2023

Ford is Making Us More Vulnerable to Climate Hazards

In October 2021, before the Ontario election in October 2021, we wrote that the Ford government was failing to protect us against climate change. Indeed, the government was doing everything it could to undo the protections that the previous government had started to put into place. More than a year later:

- after destruction caused by multiple extreme weather events in Ontario, including the “super outbreak” of thunderstorms, tornados and derechos in May that killed 11 people, damaged and destroyed buildings and infrastructure, and left more than a million households without power,
- after Ontario’s Financial Accountability Office estimated that climate change impacts on public buildings and facilities will cost \$6 billion this decade¹, along with an additional \$1.5 billion each year to maintain transportation infrastructure from the effects of extreme rainfall, extreme heat and intensified freeze-thaw cycles,²
- after the 2021 heat dome, floods and wildfires that created havoc in B.C., resulting in hundreds of deaths and billions of dollars in damages,
- after the damage wreaked on Atlantic Canada by Hurricane Fiona this year,
- after the release of the IPCC’s most recent report³ on the current and

future destruction caused by climate impacts and the need for adaptation worldwide,

- after floods that inundated 1/3 of Pakistan, caused unnumbered deaths and devastation,
- after the federal government produced a National Adaptation Strategy in a process that included Ontario and the other provinces and territories,⁴

the Ford government continues to pretend that climate change is not an issue that Ontario needs to be concerned about.

But Ontario is already getting hit with more frequent and intense heat waves, droughts, thunderstorms, ice storms, floods, even tornadoes.⁵ In the past decade we’ve seen:

- Significant floods in Windsor and Tecumseh, London, Toronto, Mississauga, Thunder Bay, Kenora and many other communities. (Kashechewan First Nation has been evacuated 14 times in less than two decades due to floods or flood risk.) We have seen floods inundate agricultural land and damage crops; damage homes and buildings, roads, culverts, bridges, sewers, stormwater lines, other underground services, shorelines and parks
- Increasing storm damage from more frequent and more intense thunderstorms; hail; tornados; and freezing rain



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- Loss of forest cover, threats to and evacuation of local communities from wildfires, especially in Northern Ontario
- Deaths and illnesses precipitated by heat waves, which also worsen air pollution
- Expanded insect populations that can better survive in warming winters, including the blacklegged tick which carries Lyme Disease, as well as agricultural pests.

Local governments bear the brunt of most extreme weather events, spending funds that should go to better services and infrastructure, housing and social programs, education and daycare, public health and nature conservation, and to rapid emissions reduction.

Some Ontario municipalities and regional governments have embarked on adaptation programs to make their communities more secure. They implemented heat warning and response systems, created new stormwater ponds, and enlarged culverts. Some also spend more on street trees and green spaces and provide financial incentives for green roofs and other protective actions. But they get little support from the Ford government.

It doesn't have to be this way. Fifteen years ago, the Ontario government of the time appointed a panel of climate scientists and adaptation experts to help the Province

plan for the impacts of climate change. The panel's report included fifty key adaptation recommendations.

The government responded with its 2009 adaptation strategy.⁶ It wasn't perfect, but it did commit to integrating climate adaptation into the plans of every relevant government department. Crucially, adaptation would feature in Environmental Assessments, Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessments, the Building Code, guidance for Building Retrofits, Drinking Water Management, Stormwater Management, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation, Forest Management, Land Use Planning and more. Work in these areas went ahead, slowly and hesitantly. However, climate adaptation and resilience were on the table.

All of this came to a grinding halt with the election of the Ford government in 2018. It jettisoned almost every new adaptation initiative, leaving the province more – not less – vulnerable. Apparently, there was too much alarm about climate breakdown. Too many restrictions on Ford's developer buddies. Too much money promised to unprofitable entities like municipalities, conservation authorities and scientists.





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A year and a half later, in November 2019, Ford inexplicably appointed yet another expert panel to produce yet another climate breakdown impact assessment.⁷ This new group, which included some of the same scientists involved in the 2007 expert panel, submitted its report in November 2021. Ford has kept this report secret for more than a year!

What's the alternative? We need a government that will:

- ! Acknowledge the current and future impacts of our rapidly changing climate, reinstate plans and policies to protect Ontarians from the damages and commit to an aggressive adaptation program**
- ! Publicly release the 2021 report prepared by the Advisory Panel on Climate Change, and commit to being transparent in sharing information we need to carry out an Ontario adaptation strategy**
- ! Cooperate and collaborate with the federal government, municipal, regional governments and First Nations in planning and implementation of priority adaptation actions**
- ! Reinstate and expand funding and decision-making authority of Conservation Authorities so they can continue and expand vital work on flood control**
- ! Provide funding for the rapid development of new local and regional flood maps, heat maps, and wind maps that incorporate climate projections and show expected future impacts**
- ! Provide funding to protect and restore forest cover, wetlands, urban green spaces and street trees, shorelines and other natural features that reduce the impact of flooding and extreme heat**
- ! Rapidly adopt into Ontario regulations recent and pending Canada Standards Association (CSA) codes that take into account expected impacts of climate change on infrastructure such as stormwater and wastewater systems, roads and bridges (the recent Canadian Highway Bridge Design Code could improve the resilience of 175 Ontario bridge projects annually)**
- ! Use climate projections to beef up the next Ontario Building Code to increase resilience of new buildings against winds, floods and sewer backups, and excessive heat (e.g. hurricane straps, backwater valves, “cool” roofs, ventilation etc.)**
- ! Update the Ontario Planning Act to require municipalities and regional governments to consider climate change impacts in planning decisions.**

¹ Costing Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation for Provincial and Municipal Public Infrastructure in Ontario: Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, October 2021

² Assessing the Financial Impacts of Extreme Rainfall, Extreme Heat and Freeze-thaw Cycles on Transportation Infrastructure in Ontario: Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 2022

³ Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022

⁴ This is not to suggest that the National Adaptation Strategy released in mid-November 2022 is even remotely adequate. But it does do a decent job of summarizing the current and expected future impacts of climate change on the country.

⁵ Adapting to Climate Change in Ontario: Report of the Expert Panel on Climate Change Adaptation, November 2009

⁶ Climate Ready: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2014.

⁷ Ontario Launches First-Ever Climate Change Impact Assessment, Ontario Newsroom, August 14, 2020