

Public searching for information on dealing with effects of climate change

Study says recent B.C. wildfires have people wondering: Should I build a house here?

Montreal, Quebec – May 31, 2010 – A study on attitudes on climate change finds people in British Columbia's interior are starting to see it happening, but worry they don't have the information they need to deal with its effects.

The study, by Julie Drolet of the School of Social Work at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C., will be presented at the 2010 Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences taking place at Montreal's Concordia University.

Drolet interviewed a range of community leaders in order to understand the effect of climate change in small cities and rural areas of B.C. In recent years, the B.C. interior has seen hot, dry summer weather, which has led to particularly disastrous wildfires.

Drolet says people she talked to generally see those fires as a direct consequence of climate change. She says they now want information on how to deal with a shifting climate. For example, she says, people are looking for guidelines about where to build new homes so they are less vulnerable to brush fires. They also want concrete information about how to deal with excessive heat or air quality problems.

"Many people believe in climate change. They say it's happening and they see its impacts taking place," she says. "What they are having difficulty with is getting information to make the changes they need to make at the local level."

According to Drolet, there is a slight difference between how men and women view climate change. Men, she says, tend to take a macro-level approach, while women are concerned about the future of their children and worry about doing small things that will make a difference – creating a community garden to improve food sustainability, for example.

But she says overall, many people are making links between things they observe – more frequent or more intense weather events, for example – and climate change. Eventually, she says the results of her study can be used to inform action.

For example, Drolet says it will be important to build capacity at the community level to deal with climate change issues. Communities, she says, will have to be prepared to respond to climate emergencies, from wildfires to heat waves. They will need plans, for example, to evacuate seniors or residents of long-term care facilities threatened by a wildfire.

"We need to plan for these things and expect them to happen instead of being surprised," she says. "People are very concerned about these issues, and they are trying to work together to address them."

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Organised by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences brings together about 9,000 researchers, scholars, graduate students, practitioners, and policy makers to share groundbreaking research and examine the most important social and cultural issues of the day. Montréal's Concordia University is the host of Congress 2010, May 28 to June 4.

The Congress program includes original research from across disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, providing a great collection of expert sources and innovative story leads. Contact the Congress Media room for assistance connecting with researchers at Congress.

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