

Hello, again, and welcome! I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. On today's program, a look at what's happening all around us. Our planet is getting hotter, and more ice is melting. Some scientists say that many low-lying areas will disappear under the sea if this continues. And, of course, there is a cost to nearly everything. How will a changing earth affect what we have to pay just to live? That's where we will focus our attention on this edition of As It Is ... on VOA.

A recent United Nations report says the world's businesses may suffer from extreme weather events. It notes the possibility of bad effects from high temperatures from climate change and growing competition for natural resources.

The U.N. report says the financial cost of extreme weather events can be very negative. Floods in Australia in 2010 and 2011, for example, resulted in more than 350 million dollars in claims to an insurance company. That helped caused the company to suffer a 38 percent drop in profits over one three-month period. The same flooding led the mining group Rio Tinto to a large earnings loss.

Nick Nuttal is with the United Nations Environmental Program. He expresses concern about the effect of weather on the future supply of natural resources.

“We are living in a world of more extreme weather events. We are living in a world of rising water scarcity. We are living in a world where things like natural resources are being gobbled up at an increasing rate. By 2050, if we carry on this way, natural resource consumption will triple.”

The U.N. report is called GEO-5 for Business: Impacts of a Changing Environment on the Corporate Sector.” It follows an examination of the state of the world’s changing climate. That report is called the United Nations Global Environment Statement. It says human pressures on the planet mean that several extremely important environmental risk marks are coming or have already been reached.

Nick Nuttal says that has widespread possibilities for the world’s businesses. The new report looks at how building, chemical, mining, food and other industries will all be affected. Mr. Nuttal gives the example of South Africa, where pressure on natural resources will affect mining costs.

“Certainly in respect to their platinum mines, they could actually face water charges 10 times their current value by 2020, so that’s in just seven years, because of water scarcity in South Africa.”

Rising temperatures will also affect the tourist industry, the report says. For example, it says less than half of the ski resorts operating in the northeastern United States will still be able to operate 30 years from now.

And Nick Nuttal says that at the same time, the world's population is growing, especially in countries with growing economies. Governments will have to make major investments in transportation and electricity.

Mr. Nuttal says it is important that the future be built with a goal of caring for the environment.

“So there is a huge amount, trillions of dollars, being invested in the coming years in many developing countries. And that is happening in a sense through the private sector. The question is whether the governments involved can push that investment into the green, environmentally friendly space.”

The United Nations report says 80 percent of the money needed to deal with climate change may come from private business.

Will there be boats instead of taxis in New York?

The continued warming of the earth's climate is melting mountain glaciers and polar ice. This is causing sea levels around the world to rise. Many scientists believe sea levels could rise by more than one meter by the end of the twenty-first century. That could mean trouble for some island nations and coastal communities like New York City. As we hear from Faith Lapidus, New York officials are studying ways to deal with the rising waters.

When super-storm Sandy struck last October, New York got a taste of what its future could be. Jerry Gonzalez was there. He lives in Brooklyn, the city's most populous borough.

"The water was up to half of the door, and then we had to get buckets and try to take out all the water. Until we opened the door, and we saw the refrigerator floating on the water."

In New York City, the waters rose more than four meters above the average high tide mark.

Studies have found that sea levels around the city could rise up to 70 centimeters by the year 2100. Klaus Jacob is a scientist at the Lamont-Doherty Observatory at Columbia University. He describes what New York would look like under those conditions.

"It would look like that Wall Street doesn't have yellow taxis. But it may have yellow taxi boats."

Mr. Jacob believes elevation is the answer. He gives an example of the Highline – a former above-ground railroad track that has been turned into a popular walkway.

“We may want to have many more of those Highlines connecting these skyscrapers. Some of them even may have transportation systems above ground instead of just subways.”

The federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, recently released new flood zone maps for New York. Mayor Michael Bloomberg calls the maps a blueprint for the future.

“Those maps will guide us in setting new construction requirements and will add new structural requirements to ensure that buildings can withstand the intense winds and waves that we expect down the road. The fact of the matter is we live next to the ocean, and the ocean comes with risks... if, as many scientists project, sea levels continue rising. However, there may be some coastline protections that we can build that will mitigate the impact of a storm surge with berms and dunes, jetties and levees.”

Michael Byrne is FEMA's coordinator in New York. He says decisions about building and rebuilding after super-storm Sandy must be planned intelligently.

“Elevation is only one of the methods to protect. We can build sea walls, we can build levees, we can choose not to rebuild at a place.”

Scientists say sea levels have risen 20 to 30 centimeters over the past 100 years. Many believe the levels could rise another one-point-five meters by the end of this century. They say coastal cities and island nations face the greatest risk. These areas will either have to develop ways to keep the ocean out or move to higher ground. I'm Faith Lapidus.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. As always, it was nice being with you for this Thursday edition of As It Is for July 25th. What's going on in the states today? Well, they're chopping wood, and sawing logs, and climbing trees at the World Lumberjack Championships in Haywood, Wisconsin, in the north central part of the country.

And we're eating hot dogs by the millions, because it's national Chili Dog Day here in the U.S. No, it's not an official holiday, but it is an excuse to eat more than we actually should. We'll be back tomorrow at the same time and hope you will join us. More Learning English programs are straight ahead, and there is world news at the beginning of the hour on the Voice of America.