

# Sea rise. It's happening. Prepare.

By: [Joe Nathanson](#) July 27, 2017



It's now almost fourteen years since the winds and storm surge generated by Hurricane Isabel headed up the Chesapeake Bay and wreaked havoc on Baltimore and other waterfront communities.

The promenade along the edge of the Inner Harbor was completely under water. Among the properties hardest hit by Isabel was Baltimore's World Trade Center. The basement of the building was flooded with 3 million gallons of water, destroying electrical, mechanical and telecommunications equipment serving the building. The Trade Center remained closed for cleanup and repairs for a full month after the storm passed through.

Also bearing the brunt of Isabel's fury was the Baltimore Museum of Industry on Key Highway. The toll there alone amounted to \$1 million in storm damage, as 5 feet of waste water flooded exhibits and impacted the building's heating and air conditioning systems.

The Fell's Point area, the Annapolis waterfront and a wide swath of eastern Baltimore County all felt the wrath of the storm. In all, the storm surge produced by Isabel caused \$410 million worth of damage in Maryland, according to a report by the National Weather Service.

The Chesapeake Bay region was spared the destruction caused by Superstorm Sandy when it struck the East Coast in 2012. But we can't just count on our luck. We have to prepare now for future events associated with severe storms and the widespread implications of sea level rise.

## **What's being done**

In fact, communities are not standing still in the face of these severe weather threats. Baltimore City's Office of Sustainability has developed plans and standards to create a more resilient infrastructure and buildings designed to withstand the adverse impacts of the anticipated rising sea levels. Among the proposed developments intended to hug the Patapsco waterfront, the Port Covington mini-city, will have to make explicit provisions for the anticipated rising waters.

Annapolis is another Chesapeake Bay community that is moving proactively to guard against the risks associated with climate change and rising sea levels. In direct response to a NOAA report that found that Annapolis “has experienced a 925 percent increase in annual average nuisance flooding events during the last 50 years,” the city is developing plans to create “the necessary public infrastructure improvements to address the tidal flooding and to improve the resilience of the downtown area.”

According to information released by the Maryland Sea Grant, a part of the University System of Maryland, “Studies show that sea levels are already rising around Maryland. Scientists have forecasted an increase of as much as 2.1 feet in the Chesapeake Bay by 2050. And by the end of this century, that number could be 3.7 feet or higher.”

It’s fortunate that we have people at the state and local level who are taking climate change and its consequences seriously and are taking actions to protect us from its hazards. One can only hope that would be the case at the national level. Unbelievably, there is an active campaign of sabotage against those scientists and other professionals who work to make us aware of the risks of a warming climate.

### **A case of retaliation?**

The latest example is the case of Joel Clement, a climate scientist at the U.S. Department of the Interior who, until recently, had been helping Alaskan Native villagers prepare for and make necessary adaptations to the realities of climate change. He is no longer doing this work, instead having been involuntarily reassigned by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to a departmental accounting office that tallies royalties the government receives from fossil fuel companies.

Lacking any prior professional experience in accounting, Clement with good reason believes he has been retaliated against for having spoken out publicly about the dangers posed by climate change to the Alaskan natives. Clement had the audacity to report that the Alaskan coastal villages of Kivalina, Shishmaref and Shaktolik that he had been assisting are perilously close to melting into the Arctic Ocean. Clearly, this was taken to be “an inconvenient truth.”

The plight of the Alaskan natives apparently is of little concern to Zinke or his boss in the Oval Office, who still would have us believe that climate change is a “Chinese hoax.”

These misguided and mean-spirited actions emanating from Washington make it ever more important that we encourage and support state and local leaders who take climate change seriously and move to protect their populations from well-documented risks.

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