

NEWS**Prospect of a big flood has city officials worried**

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The big flood of 1937, on which London bases most of its current high water plans and policies, is seen as an event that happens once every 250 years.

So the next big flood, theoretically speaking, isn't due until the year 2187, right?

Well, probably no – at least if global warming predictions are correct. And, says Slobodan Simonovic, a professor at Western, research chairperson of the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction, and a person who studies extreme weather for a living, they almost certainly are.

Dr. Simonovic made one of several linked presentations to city council's environment and transportation committee (ETC) Monday night which warned, in effect, London needs to rapidly update its risk assessment of the consequences of another big flood.

And taxpayers also need to get prepared for a big bill to cover the associated costs.

Added Peter Steblin, the city engineer: "Weather patterns are changing. We could go another 10 or 20 years before we have a significant event – or it could happen tomorrow."

In the context of planning for a lot of unexpected water and what to do with it, the city has developed models based on historic weather data. Dr. Simonovic warned, however, those models are now obsolete because of rapid changes towards extremes in weather patterns.

For example, Peterborough got hit with two storms, both considered in the 250-year range, within a short period of time. The last one, in 2004, dumped 250 mm. of rain – that's 10 inches – on the eastern Ontario city in 24 hours, more than half of it in four hours. Existing storm sewer systems were overwhelmed and there was extensive flooding and a \$100 million cleanup bill.

London has seen some serious weather, too. On July 9, 2000, a series of thunderstorms dumped 173 mm. of rain on the city – which was pretty close to 250-year expectations. There was minor flooding, but existing systems were taxed to the limit.

Many of the storm draining systems London depends on are decades old and were built to standards not considered reasonable today. Fixing them – and that would be a long-term prospect, says Ron Standish, the city's director of wastewater and treatment – would be very expensive.

In the shorter term, however, the city can develop standards more in keeping with growing fears that it could apply to new developments. One consequence of that would be an increase to new housing costs to pay for bigger storm-water management systems.

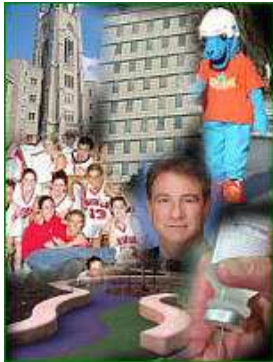
It could also redraw the high water mark of its flood plain, restricting development in areas where flooding could occur if there was a major storm, or build higher dikes to protect facilities – like the Oxford St. pollution plant – that could be threatened by flooding.

The University of Western Ontario, among others, might be unhappy with a change in the floodplain. Much of its undeveloped property would be below the line and therefore could face significant building restrictions.

Yes, but "we're not in danger of becoming a New Orleans in the near future?" speculated ETC member Cheryl Miller (Ward 14).

"There are no guarantees in life," Mr. Steblin responded. "What we are seeing is that the potential for that is going up."

ETC is now recommending to city council – which will vote on the matter this coming Monday – that work



begin immediately on updating its risk assessment studies. Before the year is out, that work will lead to a new round of discussions about how valid are the concerns about changing climate and how ready is London to cope with a new reality on the part of Mother Nature.

CANDID CAMERA – ETC member Stephen Orser (Ward 4), has pushed the city into the first step that could lead to cameras in all of London's 320 taxis.

The cameras would take a picture of every passenger, but these would be made available only to the police in the event the taxi was involved in some kind of incident.

Taxi cameras have been credited with a significant decline in violence against taxi drivers in places like Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg. Windsor is in the process of making cameras mandatory, its answer to the recent slaying of a cab driver.

Councillor Orser, himself a former taxi driver, doesn't want London to wait until that happens here.

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