

G

lobal Warming

With buildings responsible for nearly half (48%) of greenhouse gas emissions it is important that facility managers understand the impact that the property world is having on the environment. Global warming is not a new phenomena, the Earth's surface has been slowly warming up for the last 15,000 years.

The natural greenhouse effect caused by the gases around the earth warmed the planet and maintained the worlds temperature at around 15° C until the industrial revolution of the 19th century. Since then the activities of mankind particularly the burning of fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil has greatly multiplied the generation of these greenhouse gasses. As a direct consequence of this the temperature of the Earth has increased more rapidly in a shorter period of time than it has for thousands of years.

During the last 40 years, the UK's winters have grown warmer, with heavier bursts of rain. The summers have grown drier and hotter. One of the starkest changes over the last 200 years is that the summer has become drier causing widespread water shortages. The last 6 years have been the warmest years since records began. According to the Met Office during August 2003 the hottest temperature ever recorded in the UK was taken in Brogdale in Kent at 38.5°C.

The Environment Agency reports that the Thames barrier was raised on average three times a year until 2001, a year in which it was raised 15 times, and by 2030, it is expected that it will need to be raised 30 times per year. By the end of the century, the average yearly temperature of the UK could be between 1°C and 4.5°C hotter than today, depending on how high greenhouse gas levels rise.

The impact of global warming on facilities management leads to both reactionary and strategic action. The strategic approach recognises the contribution that our management of property continues to have upon the environment and embraces operational innovation aimed at reducing carbon emissions in the hope of slowing down the global warming effect.

The reactionary approach recognises the inevitability of increased climate change and engages in adaptation of design and maintenance anticipating a sustained period of extreme weather conditions with consequential impact on building operations.

For more information on global warming and the built environment see
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk