

## Out Of Harm's Way

BY KARL GROSSMAN

**L**ong Island — this island jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean — is among the most vulnerable places in the United States to be impacted by rising sea levels caused by climate change.

As a recent U.S. government multi-agency report states: "Sea level rise will create a profound shift in coastal flooding over the next 30 years by causing tide and storm surge heights to increase and reach farther inland. By 2050, 'moderate' (typically damaging) flooding is expected to occur, on average, more than 10 times as often as it does today, and can be intensified by local factors."

The report, by a group of agencies led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, says that "sea level along the U.S. coastline is projected to rise, on average, 10 to 12 inches ... In the next 30 years ... which will be as much as the rise measured over the last 100 years."

Sea level rise by 2100, "because of emissions to date," could be "about 2 feet. ... Failing to curb future emissions could cause an additional 1.5 to 5 feet of rise, for a total of 3.5 to 7 feet by the end of this century," it says.

The uncertainty about the range is because of questions about how the world's largest ice sheets will respond to rises in temperature. Melting ice sheets add more water to the world's oceans.

The U.S. government study was issued in February. On March 25, the Associated Press reported, "An ice shelf the size of New York City has collapsed in East Antarctica, an area long thought to be stable and not hit much by climate change, concerned scientists said."

Kevin McAllister, president

of the Sag Harbor-based organization Defend H2O, who has been at the forefront in Suffolk County in speaking out about climate change and what is being done — and not being done — here, says of the U.S. government report: "It is based on the most current science and further evidence of the urgency to act."

"On a global scale, it means drastically curtailing fossil fuel emissions. And on a local scale, it's rethinking the current approach to rapidly rising waters — costly sand replenishment of perpetually eroding beaches, and allowing the hard armoring of irreplaceable shorelines, both of which are environmentally and economically unsustainable practices."

"For the more vulnerable areas, the appropriate response is to move out of harm's way. Our elected officials need to come to terms with the inevitable changes before it's too late."

Or, as Jeff Peterson, retired senior policy advisor at the Environmental Protection Agency and author of the book "A New Coast: Strategies for Responding to Devastating Storms and Rising Seas," wrote this month on the The Hill website: "Today, the accepted response strategy is to hold the shoreline right where it is by building seawalls or adding sand to beaches. On the other hand, sea level rise is coming at a scale that will eventually defeat such interim protection measures. In most places, a durable solution requires stepping back from the coast, gradually relocating homes and other assets to make room for the ocean."

This month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations issued its newest report on climate change. More next week.



Karl Grossman, a resident of Noyac, is a journalism educator, author and award-winning journalist who has written "Suffolk Closeup," focusing on local and regional issues, for more than 50 years. His email address is [karlgrossman42@gmail.com](mailto:karlgrossman42@gmail.com).