

# Letters: Make Smart Preparations Against New Disasters

## *The Advocate*

**BATON ROUGE, LA.** – Aug 22, 2016 – The flooding events of the past week have been truly devastating. Tens of thousands are displaced, potentially with billions of dollars in damage to our homes, businesses and infrastructure, a mounting economic impact and, most devastating of all, lives lost.

We find ourselves repeating the phrase, "but this has never happened before." And it's true. Due to a number of factors, including climate change and shifting societal and population patterns, we are dealing with another water-related threat, different from hurricanes and storm surge. But just because this has never happened before, does it excuse those of us in the scientific community from failing to predict which areas would flood from an event of this magnitude? Does it excuse us from not effectively communicating that knowledge to governments, first-responders, citizens and businesses? These questions are not meant to point fingers, and we shouldn't imply that predictions are infallible, but disasters do offer us opportunities to learn valuable lessons and become better prepared and more resilient.

Louisiana has a track record of doing just that. Following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the state created the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, which was tasked with developing and implementing a comprehensive program aimed at protecting our communities and restoring our coast. As part of this effort, the scientific community developed monitoring and modeling tools that allow us to anticipate how various conditions may affect our coastal landscape in the short- and long-term. This approach to sustainability planning is now considered the gold standard as communities like ours across the world try to prepare for an uncertain future, from post-Hurricane Sandy New York to California's drought to the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam. While we may not be close in proximity, we face many of the same challenges, and there is a common denominator: water, whether too much of it, or not enough.

The question is: Can the state that created such an innovative and respected coastal program do the same for its inland areas threatened by inundation from floods and rainfall?

The events of the past week make it clear there is a role for The Water Institute and others throughout the scientific community to play in providing information to help us better anticipate and understand how we may be affected in the future by similar events, as well as those for which there is no historical precedence. It will require a collaborative effort, but we know it is possible.

With the support of our community, we would like to turn our collective knowledge into action so we can be better prepared for future events.

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