

Flooding could kill over 480 people and cost Britain £20 billion
Warns Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre on 50th Anniversary of worst
flood in recent times

50 years ago today Britain's worst weather disaster in recent times claimed 480 lives*. A new report claims that despite better warning systems, if the flood happened again today, the consequences could be a lot worse.

Professor Crichton, author of the report said "Old design storm defences, increased numbers of people living and working on flood plains and the absence of a large standing army could lead to more deaths and insured losses of over £20 billion - 4 times that of the losses in 1953 in today's terms".

The storm, caused by a severe depression, affected the whole of the East of England from Lerwick in Shetland to Deal in Kent. This low air pressure "sucked up" the level of the surface of the sea into a giant mound of water, which travelled south along the east coast, driven by gale force winds. 32,000 people were evacuated from their homes and sea defences were breached in 1,200 places. 24,000 homes, 200 factories and 200 miles of railway were flooded as sea came up to 2 miles inland. In Canvey Island alone, 13,000 people were evacuated and nearly 60 people died.

The death toll would have been a lot worse were it not for the large amount of military personnel including Americans and Canadians, still stationed in the area after the war and the availability of wartime military landing craft.

The report published by the Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre, "**Flood Risk and Insurance in England & Wales: are there lessons to be learned from Scotland?**" provides a comprehensive guide to the problems Britain faces in dealing with flooding as well as a range of solutions. These include the "Crichton Formula" which if adopted, could make flood insurance both more readily available and affordable without increased burdens on taxpayers for flood defences.

ENDS

Professor Crichton is available for interview

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Notes to Editors:

The following figures do not include those who subsequently died prematurely due to the experience

Death toll from the 1953 event (Conservative estimates)

Lincolnshire	40*
Norfolk	100*
Suffolk	44*
Essex	<u>120*</u>
Total	304

Deaths at sea

Loss of the "Princess Victoria" (Irish Sea ferry)	130*
Loss of fishermen from the "Michael Griffiths", "Guava" and other trawlers	45*
Loss of lifeboatmen	<u>2*</u>
Total	177

* Source of information on UK deaths: Kelman, I, 2002. CURBE Fact Sheet 3: UK Deaths from the 1953 Storm Surge (available from: <http://www.arct.cam.ac.uk/curbe/CURBEFactSheet3UK1953Deaths.doc>)

- A further 1,835 people were drowned in the Netherlands.
- The low pressure went down to 968 millibars (what's normal)
- 480 deaths (accounts vary, the number might be slightly more or less)
- 1,200 breaches of sea defences
- 650 square kilometres of land flooded
- 32,000 people evacuated
- £5 billion damage (at current values)
- 24,000 houses, 200 major factories, and 200 miles of railway were flooded.

An American airman, Corporal Reis Leming, became the first non-British recipient of the George Medal, after saving 27 people from the freezing water, even though he was a non-swimmer.

Largely as a result of this storm, the Thames is now one of the best defended estuaries in the world, with the Thames Barrier, 36 additional tidal barriers and gates, as well as 200 miles of flood walls which were upgraded in the 1980s.

The report is published by the **Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre**, and is available for free downloading from their web site (www.bghrc.com)