

Sustainable Ideford: H is for Heatwaves

This spring, the world's oceans reached a temperature not seen since at least 1982. Two forces are working together: global warming and the transition from a weather pattern called El Nina to its opposite, El Nino. For the last three years, El Nina has held temperatures down somewhat, but El Nino will raise them above the long-term trend.

This is important because warmer seas mean more moisture is drawn into the air and extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and floods, become more likely.

Last year we had a very dry summer with spells of extreme heat. The temperature went above 40 degrees for the first time in the UK (in Lincolnshire) and despite the cooling effect of El Nina, the average UK temperature, day and night, winter and summer, exceeded 10 degrees for the first time. Devon avoided record-breaking temperatures, reaching 33.8 on 18 July, below the record of 35.4 set in 1990, but we may not be so lucky next time.

The Met Office is cautious about forecasting more heatwaves this summer, but recognises that the end of the La Nina pattern means the global average is likely to be higher than last year. So we should all be prepared for some very hot weather: if it doesn't come during this summer, it may well come in the next.

What can we do to prepare ourselves? Conserving water will become more and more important: SW Water said in April that reservoir levels were 17% lower than the same time last year. So it's worth thinking about water-butts and channelling water from the shower to the garden. Remember also to provide water for birds and other wildlife during dry spells. We also need to be more wary about wildfires: we have got used to the idea that we live in a damp region where wildfires are impossible, but this may not be the case in future. So bonfires are definitely out in drought periods and barbecues have to be used with caution.

None of this, however, will have any impact on the trend towards a hotter and hotter climate. To slow that process down, we need to reduce our carbon emissions, where they are in our control, and put pressure on the government to fulfil its net zero promises at a national level.

Sustainable Ideford has plans to help residents measure and reduce their emissions. Watch this space!