

Sea level – The Thames Barrier Statistics

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Claim: *The Thames flood control barrier, built to protect London from flooding, is used more often now than when it first started operation in 1983. Mr. David King, British Science advisor, uses this information as evidence for sea level rise and increased storminess resulting from climate change.*

This claim has been **discredited** in an official British report.

It is true that the Thames Barrier has been closing with increased frequency; however, the reasons behind this have little to do with global climate change. According England's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (from a report developed in cooperation with England's Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs):

"Historical records of rising tide levels in London reflect the fact that SE England is **tilting downwards** at around 30 cm a century, and that **settlements have narrowed the river** - the width of the Thames at Westminster is now about one-third of its width in Roman times."

"Because the Thames River Barrier is now **subject to different operating rules**, it may be less useful as an indicator. The barrier is now closed to retain water in the Thames River as well as to lessen the risk of flooding. (It was closed on 9 successive tides at the start of 2003.) Thus, the number of closures has increased greatly in recent years. This indicator would only be useful if it were possible to distinguish the number of closures made specifically to lessen flood risk."

Obviously, not only is the frequency of the closing of the Thames Barrier **not a good indicator** of potential flooding as rules for its closure have changed over time, but since the river channel has been greatly modified and since the region has been **sinking due to development and other geological influences**, even a true indicator of flooding potential would not clearly reflect the influence of climate changes. Thus, the use of the Thames Barrier statistics by Mr. King to demonstrate climate change is **not a fair use of the data**.

Reference:

Indicators of Climate Change in the U.K., 2003. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. (<http://www.nbu.ac.uk/iccuk/>)