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Zurich Canada supports SFU climate change initiative

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September 11, 2007

Insurance company Zurich Canada is preparing to work with Simon Fraser University to examine ways to cope with the ongoing challenges of extreme weather events caused by climate change.

The insurance industry is feeling the impact of increasingly frequent climate-related events such as Hurricane Katrina and the recent UK flooding. Zurich is taking a proactive role in response by supporting ACT (the Adaptation to Climate Change Team), SFU's new adaptation policy planning initiative.

The ACT/Zurich Canada program kicks off in May 2008, and will bring together Canadian and international experts to examine the science, publicize the issues and recommend policy options for sustainable adaptation to government, industry, and community leaders.

'Climate change is obviously of tremendous importance to Zurich Canada,' said CEO Robert Landry. 'Supporting ACT gives us an opportunity to actively assist in the development of policies that will benefit our customers and society as a whole.'

Global losses due to natural disasters in 2005 were estimated at over US \$200 billion, with insured losses topping US \$70 billion. In Canada, weather extremes are causing increasing damage to property, crops, communities and tourism. Last winter, violent storms caused power outages and a boil-water advisory for a record two million British Columbians.

The extreme weather trend is set to continue. Natural Resources Canada predicts an increase in severe droughts, storms, forest fires and floods with serious economic and social impacts; while the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fourth Report warns temperature extremes and heavy precipitation will become more frequent.

The ACT program grew out of concerns raised by renowned economist and SFU professor Richard Lipsey about policy gaps in addressing adaptation, and is intended to complement the mitigation and carbon footprint-reduction planning now underway nation-wide.

Led by SFU's Public Policy program, with the involvement of many SFU departments including Urban Studies and Dialogue, ACT will generate policy options and public education tools for adaptation to climate change-related issues including extreme weather events, community impacts, health risks, fresh water supply, crop and food adaptation, energy production and distribution, new technologies and displaced populations.

'At SFU, our focus is 'Thinking of the World',' says President Michael Stevenson. 'ACT will be a valuable resource for Canadian industry, governments and communities and also has the potential to benefit the international community.'