

Engineering Methods for Precipitation under a Changing Climate



Edited by
J. Rolf Olsen, Ph.D.
Kelcy T. Adamec, DE

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Engineering Methods for Precipitation under a Changing Climate

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Sponsored by
Subcommittee on Hydroclimatology and Engineering Adaptation (HYDEA) of the
Committee on Adaptation to a Changing Climate of the
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Contents

Preface	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Chapter 1 Engineering Methods for Precipitation under a Changing Climate: Practicing Engineers and the Issue of Changing Climate	1
Mathini Sreetharan, Jason Giovannettone	
Chapter 2 Do Record Storm Events Produce Floods of the Same Magnitude?.....	15
Miguel A. Medina	
Chapter 3 HEC-17: Highways in the River Environment—Floodplains, Extreme Events, Risk, and Resilience	49
Roger Kilgore, George R. Herrmann, Wilbert O. Thomas, David B. Thompson	
Chapter 4 Hydrologic Designs for Extreme Events under Nonstationarity.....	63
Jayantha T. B. Obeysekera, Jose D. Salas	
Chapter 5 Extreme Precipitation Analysis with Serial Dependency for a Changing Climate.....	83
Huiling Hu, Bilal M. Ayyub	
Chapter 6 Towards Formulating a National Guideline on the Design of Building Enclosures Subjected to Climate Change in Canada.....	97
Abhishek Gaur, Michael Lacasse	
Chapter 7 Bridging Science and Engineering: Engineering Methods for Precipitation under a Changing Climate	115
Kelcy T. Adamec, Robert Fields	

**Chapter 8 Breakout Session Key Concepts on Engineering
Methods for Precipitation under a Changing
Climate123**
Robert Fields, Kelcy T. Adamec

Index..... 129

Preface

Civil engineers are responsible for the planning and design of functional, durable, and safe infrastructure. Floods and heavy precipitation events affect many types of civil engineering infrastructure. Engineering planning and design standards are based on various durations and magnitudes of these extreme precipitation events depending on the function of the infrastructure and the consequences of failure.

Engineering design has historically assumed that the past observed record of precipitation extremes and flooding will be representative of the future. This assumption is questionable under a changing climate. However, projections of future climate are also uncertain. The ensemble of all existing global climate models represents only a fraction of the full range of potential future climate, and results can vary substantially between models. It is particularly problematic to project future heavy precipitation extremes and to estimate probabilities associated with these future events.

The Subcommittee on Hydroclimatology and Engineering Adaptation (HYDEA) of ASCE's Committee on Adaptation to a Changing Climate conducted a workshop to discuss how engineers should incorporate extreme precipitation into engineering design and planning given an uncertain and changing future climate. The workshop was held at the ASCE Headquarters on May 30, 2017. Objectives were to

- Review engineering methods for designing for and managing precipitation extremes and floods throughout the life cycle of projects.
- Review approaches to uncertainty and how acceptable risk is determined.
- Communicate with climate scientists on engineering needs for climate information and receive status on climate trends, climate projections, and uncertainty.

This report is an outcome of that workshop.

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CHAPTER 1

Engineering Methods for Precipitation under a Changing Climate: Practicing Engineers and the Issue of Changing Climate

Mathini Sreetharan, Ph.D., P.E.*
Jason Giovannettone, Ph.D., P.E.*

Abstract: *Climate change studies have focused on mean values of temperature and precipitation. To understand the climate future and its impact on the Nation's civil infrastructure, the qualitative terminology of "heavy," "very heavy," and "extreme" precipitation used by the climate scientist needs to be translated to the frequency rainfalls and discharges used by the civil engineer. Because of the climate change message consumed by the general public, engineers have been requested to develop 'climate resilient' designs. To accommodate climate trends into design, engineers have moved away from the comfortable zone of implementing nationally accepted design standards to developing methodologies. This paper mentions few areas where localized climate solutions are developed by engineers and provide a summary of emerging climate guidance available to the public from Federal and State Agencies. Climate stationarity is the cornerstone of all water-resources design standards. The paper concludes that two pressing needs exist: first, a national scale study to assess evidence of climate non-stationarity in rainfall stream flow records and, second, if it will impact current design standards and practices.*

Keywords: *Climate change; non-stationarity; rainfall; discharge; water-resources; design; standards*

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