DROUGHT & EXTREME HEAT

Kia ora! We've had lots of focus recently in Maketu on water inundation and great work has been done to prepare our community for heavy rain events and sea level rise. But there's another threat that we need to be aware of and preparing for. As greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, so does the likelihood of more frequent and intense heatwaves. The consequences of extreme heat events can be far-reaching and preparation is essential.

The likelihood of extreme heat events in Maketu, like many other regions, is steadily increasing. Climate models indicate a higher frequency of heatwaves, with temperatures surpassing historical records. While it's challenging to predict exact dates, it's safe to assume that Maketu will experience more sweltering days in the coming years.

The impact of even of a few days of extreme heat include health risks such as heat exhaustion and heatstroke, especially among vulnerable populations like our kaumatua and pēpi. Agriculture and local ecosystems can suffer due to drought conditions, and the potential for fires increase. Moreover, increased energy demand for cooling can strain the power grid.

Extreme heat events are characterised by prolonged periods of excessively high temperatures, often accompanied by elevated humidity levels. In Maketu, this can translate to scorching summers days accompanied by hot humid nights where the temperature doesn't drop. For those without access to cooling there may be no relief from the heat for two or more days.

To protect the community of Maketu from extreme heat events, a proactive approach is essential. Actions we can take to protect our community and enhance resilience to extreme heat events could include:

- Education: Raise awareness about the risks of extreme heat; provide information on how people can prepare themselves, their homes and gardens for heat; and how to stay safe during heatwaves.
- Heat-Resilient Infrastructure: Invest in infrastructure like heat-resistant housing and cooling centres.
- Community Support: Establish a support network to check on vulnerable residents and provide assistance if needed.
- Healthcare Support: Mobilise healthcare professionals to provide care for those affected by heat-related illnesses.
- Water Conservation: Promote responsible water use during droughts to ensure a sustainable supply.
- Emergency Plans: Develop and rehearse heatwave-specific emergency plans, including evacuation procedures if necessary.
- Green Initiatives: Promote tree planting and green spaces to mitigate the 'heat island' effect (i.e., built up areas that experience higher temperatures than outlying areas).

Community Response to Extreme Heat:

In the event of an extreme heatwave, Maketu should initiate a coordinated response with:

- Public Alerts: Communicate the heatwave forecast and safety tips through local media and community channels.
- Cooling Centres: Open designated cooling centres where residents can seek refuge from the heat.
- Check-Ins: Encourage neighbours to check on each other, particularly those who may be more vulnerable.
- Water Distribution: Ensure a supply of safe drinking water for all residents.
- Healthcare Support: Mobilise healthcare professionals to provide care for those affected by heat-related illnesses.
- Power Conservation: Encourage energy conservation to prevent overloading the power grid.
- Communication: Maintain open lines of communication with local authorities for updates and assistance.

Extreme heat is a formidable challenge that requires a united front. By taking proactive measures and fostering community resilience, Maketu can adapt to the changing climate while ensuring the safety and well-being of our residents.

Our Maketu Climate Change Adaptation Plan (He Toka Tū Moana Mō Maketu) touches on many of these desired and necessary actions. The aim is to be proactive and work together to take practical action with, and for, our community. Several projects are underway that will help us become more resilient to extreme heat. Read more about these projects here and get in touch if you want to be involved in any of this mahi.