

Presentation title:

## Policing the climate emergency: a case study of flooding in England and Wales

**Speaker:** Michael Rowe (Northumbria University, UK)

**Co-authors:** Tanya Wyatt and Kelly Sinclair (Northumbria University, UK)

In recent years the UK has experienced significant incidents of flooding. Climate change appears to be transforming what were thought to be 'once in a generation' civil disasters into common challenges that recur relatively frequently. Such emergencies or 'civil contingencies' are examples of activities in which police play a central role, but which (erroneously) are often not considered as part of their mandate (which is usually cast in narrow law enforcement terms). This paper explores how policing is organised in relation to flooding and the implications this has in terms of multi-agency working, leadership and organisational frameworks, and public communications. Alongside other novel policing activity (most obviously in relation to pandemic policing) this makes non-traditional aspects of the police role more significant. The paper develops recent work which argues that policing is becoming increasingly embroiled with the notion of societal resilience and maintaining operant conditions (in terms of power, technology, health, food, and so on). Holley et al (2020) and Simpson et al (2020) found 'decentralised and polycentric' responses to climate emergencies in South Africa, and this paper explores similar phenomena in the UK context. There is little prior work on the engagement of the public police in the sphere of civil contingency planning. The paper explores assemblages of policing deployed in response to flooding; assemblages that are rapidly transitory, reliant on informal local relations of trust, and are usually considered as exceptional forms of work in the context of the core business of the various parties. This perspective suggests that models of plural policing need to be rethought to incorporate the realities of this rapidly assembled, deployed and disbanded policing networks. The paper outlines the terrain for conceptualisation policing and climate emergency in terms of public legitimacy, mandate, and the need for evidence-based policing.