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U.K. citizen reporter Peter Hinchliffe gives an eye-witness account  
Peter Hinchliffe (Hinchy)

Record June rainfall brought chaos to parts of England.

Three people died in floods, thousands had to evacuate their homes and workers had to be lifted from factory rooftops as rivers burst their banks, turning streets into raging torrents.

Roads and schools were closed. Vehicles -- including mine -- were stuck for hours in traffic jams.

Today, as mopping-up operations began, the M1, the country's main North-South highway, was closed because a dam was threatening to burst.

Rising water levels were threatening to spill out of Ulley damn near Rotherham in South Yorkshire. If the dam breaks, water could cascade down two valleys and pour onto the motorway and an electricity power station. Special buses were laid on to evacuate residents from nearby villages. They were provided with makeshift overnight accommodation in a school.

In the city of Sheffield, also in South Yorkshire, two people drowned as rivers burst their banks. A 13-year-old boy was swept away yesterday afternoon as he walked home from school. His body was found quarter-of-a-mile downstream. A 68-year-old man was drowned as he tried to cross the road near his home.

Main-line trains from Sheffield, and other Yorkshire cities, to London were cancelled today.

Some Sheffield people were moved to tears after surveying the extent of the damage to their homes, but there is a strong community spirit in the city and a determination to get back to normal as quickly as possible.

A 28-year-old man also died in the East Coast port city of Hull. His leg became trapped while he was trying to clear a blocked drain. Fire crews and police divers battled for three hours to save him as floodwaters rose relentlessly, but to no avail.

Major roads into Hull, a vital trading port, were closed as the four inches of rain pelted down throughout the day. Lorries carrying goods bound for the European mainland and cars were backed up for miles.

Traffic was diverted onto narrow lanes. Police constables wearing yellow jackets, rain cascading from their traditional helmets, manned lonely country crossroads, giving advice and directions.

My wife and I were caught up in the chaos as we travelled towards Hull's North Sea ferry terminal. We were due to board one of P and O's 59,000 tonne ferries, scheduled to leave at 9 p.m. for the overnight voyage to Rotterdam, Holland -- a pleasant start to a week's holiday on the Continent.

Hearing a weather forecast predicting unusually heavy rainfall and possible flooding, we set out from home around 1 p.m. on the 62-mile drive to the port.

Some 15 miles from Hull I was diverted onto roads which led through villages with attractive names: Little Weighton, High Hunsley, Bishop Burton. At 6:30 p.m. I reached the market town of Beverley, North of Hull. There the ground floors of

attractive stone cottages were flooded. People were splashing around in thigh-length waders and a few intrepid car drivers were risking going through a junction where floodwater was above wheel height.

Radio messages said the main road through Hull was still closed. We returned home, there to negotiate a ferry crossing on another day.

Britain is currently experiencing wave after wave of depressions which are rolling in from the Atlantic Ocean. Each one of them brings an unseasonal cargo of wind and rain.

Meanwhile people in South Eastern Europe are roasting in over-hot temperatures. In recent days temperatures of up to 44°C have been recorded in Greece and Italy. A record high temperature has been recorded in Bulgaria.

Are Britain's heavy rainfall and southern Europe's record-breaking heatwave all part and parcel of climate changes caused by global warming?

"No proof that it is," said our local TV weatherman, "but I think global warming is the cause."

While householders and insurance companies begin to estimate the multi-million pounds of damage caused by the floods, more heavy rain is predicted for Britain later this week.