



2012 was the second wettest year on record in the UK and the wettest ever in England, the Met Office announced on Thursday.

The downpours that caused more than 8,000 homes and businesses to suffer flooding led to a total of 1,330.7mm of rain for the year, just 6.6mm short of the wettest UK year recorded in 2000 (1337.3mm).

Analysis by the Met Office also suggests that the UK may be getting increasingly wetter as climate change causes warmer air to carry more water. Days of extreme rainfall – downpours expected once every 100 days – occurred every 70 days in 2012.

"The trend towards more extreme rainfall events is one we are seeing around the world, in countries such as India and China, and now potentially here in the UK," said Prof Julia Slingo, chief scientist at the Met Office. "It's essential we look at how this may impact our rainfall patterns going forward over the next decade and beyond, so we can advise on the frequency of extreme weather in the future and the potential for more surface and river flooding."

The exceptionally wet year of 2012 began with a very dry spell and water companies imposing a widespread hosepipe ban. But a deluge followed with April and June both being the wettest months since records began in 1910. December was the eighth wettest on record for the UK.

While England suffered the wettest year on record, 2012 was the third wettest for Wales, the 17th wettest for Scotland and the 40th wettest for Northern Ireland.

The Met Office noted that there has been a high frequency of wet years since 2000 in the UK, with four of the top five wettest years occurring since then. It also found that long-term averages of 30-year periods show an increase in annual rainfall of about 5% from 1961-1990 to 1981-2010, although it notes that there is always a great deal of variability in UK rainfall because the country's position on the western edge of Europe means its weather patterns are constantly changing.

The apparent trend to wetter weather may be influenced by the shrinking of the Arctic ice cap, which reached a record low in 2012, or changes in sea surface temperatures due to natural cycles, said the Met Office. But it said more research needs to be done before the extent of their role can be established.

Despite the government's own scientists concluding that global warming is increasing the risk of flooding in the UK, the coalition cut spending on flood defences by more than 25% in the year it entered office. In July the Guardian revealed that almost 300 schemes that had been in line for funding in 2010 had not been built.