

# News Release

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## **Willis Creates New University Climate & Catastrophe Research Network**

**London, UK, September 11, 2006** – Willis Group Holdings (NYSE:WSH), the global insurance broker, has created The Willis Research Network (WRN) - the largest collaboration between the insurance industry and academia. This unique network, comprised of seven leading university research groups focusing on weather and environmental modelling, will produce practical research which will ensure clients benefit from state-of-the-art interpretation of catastrophic risks and the financial mechanisms with which they can counter these threats.

WRN will be run under the auspices of Willis' Analytics & Solutions division, which provides analysis and advises companies on the financial impact of natural catastrophes such as hurricanes, storms, floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis and also arranges (re)insurance and other related risk transfer solutions.

Willis' UK group will contain expertise across meteorology, geography, engineering, architecture and the earth sciences and includes the renowned Centre for Global Atmospheric Modelling, part of the world's leading department of meteorology at Reading University, the Centre for Risk in the Built Environment at Cambridge, as well as key institutions at Imperial College, Durham, Bristol, Exeter and City University.

Rowan Douglas, executive director of Willis and chairman of the WRN, explained: "The primary purpose of the research network is to better predict the frequency, severity and costs of future catastrophes world-wide".

"The insurance market is the ultimate 'consumer product' – as it is the mechanism through which international society and the economy share the costs and burdens of severe catastrophes."

Mr Douglas added: "The UK is a world centre for environmental and climate sciences but no one was pulling together these pre-eminent but separate groups. We hope the various collaborative projects will create a cohesive and far more accurate picture of climate and extreme events and their effects on our infrastructure."

A key network member, Reading University's Department of Meteorology, works extensively with the Met Office's Hadley Centre global climate model, currently the world standard. This model, now capable of representing hazardous weather, is currently run on the Earth Simulator supercomputer in Japan, and in 2007 will be installed on the new,

even more powerful £100m supercomputer, the HECToR or High End Computing Terascale Resource, in the UK.

“This will significantly increase our capability to project future changes in storm tracks, droughts and other macro weather events at a regional level,” predicts Prof Julia Slingo, Director of Reading University’s Centre for Global Atmospheric Modelling.

The UK research group will form part of a wider network of Willis-funded research at universities in in Asia, Europe and the Americas, and the total number of research scientists at these institutions will be more than 1,000.

Julie Serakos, Executive Vice President, Willis Analytics & Solutions said, “We’re very excited about the network and look forward to rolling it out globally and working with other academic institutions around the world”.

Mr Douglas said: “We aim to build first class academic research into this next generation of catastrophe event modelling and translate the data into useful information for clients.”

Mark Hvidsten, CEO, Willis Analytics & Solutions commented, “The network will augment and enhance the scope of our research capabilities, and in turn will enable us to advise our clients to even greater effect”.

More information can be found at [www.willisresearchnetwork.com](http://www.willisresearchnetwork.com)

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## **Notes to Editor**

Group photo of participants available on request

Table of Universities and their areas of research attached

## **Additional information and quotes from the individual University research groups**

Future collaboration projects may, for example, involve the unification of flood incident data and modelling work being undertaken by Professor Stuart Lane at Durham University’s Department of Geography, and in its new Institute for Hazard & Risk Research, with the comprehensive urban housing knowledge of Cambridge University’s Department of Architecture, under the auspices of Robin Spence, professor of architectural engineering.

Advanced remote sensing and other analytical techniques pioneered by Bristol University’s Departments of Geography and Civil Engineering, led by Prof Paul Bates

and Prof Colin Taylor, will then be applied to this combined data to produce a highly detailed predictor of flood risk – especially for the low-lying east of England towns currently threatened by rising sea levels and future North Sea storm surges.

Prof Spence said: “There are no other initiatives like this. We need to get better science into the insurance sector for common public benefit. We now have the means to forecast the often dire consequences on man’s engineered structures from flood, earthquake and serial storm patterns.”

He added: “If we fuse the geographical information systems (GIS) models of flood hazard with those of the urban building stock we will be able to dramatically improve flood risk mapping”

The network has a strong seismic element, too. Prof Julian Bommer, an expert in earthquake hazard assessment and infrastructural damage at Imperial College London’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, is joining the network. His group has undertaken important work in assessing the effects of earthquakes in Turkey, with Willis, and across Europe, Japan and the Americas. Secondly, Durham University recently established an international landslide centre, led by Prof David Petley which has carried out an analysis of the earthquake-stricken zones of northern Pakistan.

The University of Exeter plans to join the network in April 2007 when Dr David Stephenson takes up a professorship position in climate analysis co-funded by the Met Office and the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research. Dr David Stephenson, a world-renowned expert in statistical climatology, says, “This network will provide an ideal framework for developing my recent research on the clustering of windstorms and other extreme weather and climate events”.

In the past, says Prof Stuart Lane of Durham, “we have suffered from much more uncertainty than knowledge in extreme event prediction - by joining up climate models, process understanding and impact analysis the network will revolutionise catastrophe modelling”.

Prof David Rhind, now vice-chancellor at City University in London and considered the father of GIS science in the UK, said: “City – with the best GIS academic researchers in Britain and with world-wide partners - will contribute uniquely advanced spatial visualisation techniques and multi-dimensional surface modelling to all this data. This will get people to start believing in these prediction models again.”

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