

# Watt's Happening?

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## Let's get serious



*Soon renewable energy will be cheaper, cleaner and more reliable than conventional energy, and the transition to clean energy will boost the economy,*

*create a cleaner and healthier environment, create more jobs per dollar invested and make us more competitive. What, exactly, are we waiting for?*

It's a new year. Time to get serious. If you are a regular reader of *Watt's Happening*, you've probably noticed that I am pretty optimistic and excited about the opportunities that our switch to renewable energy promises.

You may also have noticed that I think solar panels that make electricity from sunlight, giant wind turbines that effortlessly power thousands of homes, and sleek electric cars that out-perform anything on the road today, are all just plain cool.

Today we're going to get serious and talk

about why all this cool stuff is also NECESSARY.

### WELCOME TO THE ANTHROPOCENE

A new term has emerged to describe the era in which we are living: the *Anthropocene*, the geological epoch dominated by human beings.

We have now changed pretty well everything about our little blue marble that a species can change, excelling at haphazardly mucking with things and ignoring the consequences.

Toxic pollutants are now everywhere, from pole to pole, in all the air, water and soil, from the highest mountains to the deepest oceans. The ice caps at both poles are melting at absurd rates, as well as most of the glaciers. The acidity and temperature of all the world's lakes, seas and oceans have increased, threatening everything that lives in them. Species are going extinct at a rate not seen for millions of years. And now it is clear that we are destabilizing the weather systems in unpredictable ways that threaten everything that makes human life on this little planet possible.

Its not "global warming" any more. Things aren't just warming up (which for Canadians sounds kind of OK) they're screwing up, badly, and its starting to affect everything: increased wild fires around the world, increases in storm frequency and severity, the death of coral reefs, massive and persistent droughts and heat waves . . . it's happening. Now.

World governments have now reluctantly agreed: to save our economies and ourselves we must de-carbonize immediately. Carbon dioxide and methane, mostly released by the burning of fossil fuels, must quickly be reduced and then practically eliminated by 1) becoming much more efficient in how we use energy and 2) rapidly switching to non-carbon energy sources like solar and wind power.

### OPTIMISM BIAS

A recent survey found that about 80 percent of Canadians agree that the climate is changing, but about half of those were unsure as to why it was happening. One in six outright denied that humans had anything to do with it. Eighty percent new nothing about carbon trading, and almost nothing about

renewable energy.

Only 14 percent thought that climate change would affect them "a great deal," one third thought it would affect them "moderately" in their lifetimes, and half said "very little or not at all."

This is just human nature, of course. We are built to deal with the immediate problems of our own individual lives, primarily those that affect the next few hours, days or weeks. Long-term collective problems that encompass our entire planet are a bit much for most folks, and that's understandable.

We also have a built-in "optimism bias" – we all want to believe that things are going to be OK. Unpleasant information is easily denied, our beliefs reinforced by the people and information we collect around ourselves. Inconvenient information is easily ignored or declared invalid. Not good.

### GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

That's where the government is supposed to come in, and on that front Canada has fallen far, far behind. Remember, we've just had a decade when government refused to talk about climate change, and clamped down on any talk about it by anyone, period.

If, instead, we have leaders who put forward a clear and rational agenda and actually LEAD us into a clean, smart energy future, we will follow. Soon renewable energy will be cheaper, cleaner and more reliable than conventional energy, and the transition to clean energy will boost the economy, create jobs and make us more competitive.

And it could save our butts. What, exactly, are we waiting for?

## ***Watt's Happening? Quick Fact:***

**Electric cars ARE cleaner:** yet another study has shown that EVs are cleaner than gasmobiles, even across their complete lifecycle. A new study by the Union of Concerned Scientists calculated the relative impacts from raw materials, manufacturing, operation and disposal. Battery cars win again.

