

Watt's Happening? #182

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ACHIEVING Climate Success Part 2



*Climate success means more clean energy jobs, a healthier environment,
and less climate risk to life and property.*

**“I say the debate is over. We know the science. We see the threat.
The time for action is now.”**

Arnold Schwarzenegger

Our neglected planet needs some help. Last week we learned that beating climate change might not be the insurmountable problem that many would have us believe. It's big, for sure, but doable.

EXPENSE IS THE BIG ONE

What's really going to cost us is NOT doing something! Ask any insurance company how things are going these days. Not well, and it's because human-caused climate change is accelerating and weather damage to life and property is skyrocketing.

A recent CBC interview with an insurance industry expert made it very clear. Roughly he said “If you are a climate denier in the insurance industry, you just lost your job. Dealing with climate change is our primary concern. We have the numbers, the trends are clear. It's not good and it's getting worse.”

As mentioned last issue, a 2015 Simon Fraser University study calculated that deep decarbonization of the U.S. economy (80% carbon reduction by 2050) would cost a bit more than Americans spend on cosmetic surgery, less than they spend on gambling, and much less than they spend on going out for lunch.

Another recent study has shown that in typical middle-class urban areas in developing or developed countries, less than 10% of household budgets go to energy services. Deeply decarbonizing one of these households should increase these costs by no more than 15% in typical jurisdictions. That's 15% of 10%: not a lot to pay for preventing catastrophic climate change.

DECARBONIZE

Anyone with a reasonable middle-class income can deeply decarbonize their lifestyles by becoming near zero-emission in their home energy use and personal mobility. And much of these increased costs are incurred up front, installing new energy systems, which are then paid off with decreased energy bills.

Electricity for an electric or plug-in hybrid vehicle costs a lot less per kilometer than gasoline or diesel. The electricity you generate on your rooftop solar array costs less than you are paying for grid electricity right now.

These are direct actions that many of us can take, a bit at a time, over the next few years.

The more of us who do so, the more we increase the chance that our friends, neighbors and family will see how easy it is and will follow our lead.

PERSONAL NOT ENOUGH

But of course we know that personal action and setting an example are not enough. Very, very important, but not enough. We need government too.

Science tells us that proven fossil fuel reserves, if all burned, would raise sea levels by 30 meters (100 feet) and raise the temperature of the planet to a level

much like the hellish hot house atmosphere of the planet Venus. This is not something we can “adapt to.” It is something we absolutely must avoid.

Reducing global greenhouse gas emissions is a global collective action problem – most of humanity must act together to solve it.

CARBON PRICING

Putting a price on emissions, whether with a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system, can help. With carbon pricing, each individual, each business, each industry, each country can decide for itself how and by how much it will reduce emissions.

If I see the price of gasoline go up a few cents, I can decide that my next car will be electric, (emissions will go down) or I can go right ahead and keep running my beloved gas guzzler (emissions will stay the same). My choice. Government stays in the background, and I decide, while overall, emissions fall with the least possible inconvenience and expense.

And don't believe politicians or industry spokespersons who insist that it is pointless for us to bother reducing our emissions unless the big guys, like China and the U.S., do it first. This is the “free ride” policy so popular among pundits with vested interests looking for easy votes and support for “business as usual.” It's OK if we pollute, we just gotta get those other guys to cut down.

Horse poop. Canada is a rich country. To achieve climate success, leadership is what the world needs more than anything.

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