

Watt's Happening? #249

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Bad News, Good News

Making progress to a zero carbon world ... slowly



This September hundreds of thousands of climate activists and concerned citizens held protests around the world as the globe suffers from dramatic weather extremes and unprecedented heat and fire. Climate change is upon us.

(photo Mark Dixon/wikimedia commons)

Too much good news can backfire. It can cause complacency: “Everything is OK, I don’t have to worry.”

So while I tend to focus on the positive, I must also say, from time to time, that everything is not OK and there is a lot to worry about.

Climate change is upon us. If you are not in the scientific loop regarding the climate, you may not know that the debate is over: human activity, especially the emission of carbon dioxide from fuel burning, is causing our climate to become hotter, unstable, unpredictable, and deadly.

We are the cause, and we are the solution. Action is needed on all fronts, from you, and me, from government at all levels and from industry.

And now with historic floods, historic heat,

historic storms, and historic fire, the world is finally waking up.

PROTESTS FIRE UP

One of the first steps we need to take is simply to stop making things worse. Well, things are still getting worse, and people are fed up with it.

Earlier this month hundreds of thousands took to the streets around the world in support of climate action. From Canada and the United States to Asia, Africa and Europe, climate activists and concerned citizens held protests to call for an end to the burning of planet-warming fuels.

Often led by youth based organizations, like Greta Thunberg’s Friday for Future movement, the protests took place in dozens of countries and

hundreds of cities worldwide. 75,000 marched in New York City.

Said one Toronto campaigner. “Our homes, our health, and our loved ones are under attack.”

A STAGGERING TRANSITION

Climate awareness is growing rapidly now, but the scale of the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies like solar and wind is staggering. Most people have no idea of the immense size of the fossil fuel infrastructure built up over the last 200 years around the world: an unbelievable amount of infrastructure will have to be replaced with all new, clean energy infrastructure. And we have to do it, if the climate science is correct (and so far it has been), in just a few decades.

There are about 1.5 billion liquid fuel vehicles on the road right now (Yes, billion with a “b”), burning some 350 million gallons of gasoline every day. Overall the world consumes some 100 million barrels of oil every day. Every day! That is a lot of energy to replace with electricity from renewable resources like wind and solar. A lot.

UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH IN RENEWABLES

But there is an immense amount of renewable energy available on planet Earth. We can indeed switch to cleaner energy sources, and we’re doing so right now.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) says prospects for the world staying within the 1.5C limit on global climate change are bright, owing to the “staggering” growth of renewables and green

investments in the past two years.

“Solar photovoltaic installations and electric vehicle sales are perfectly in line with what we said they should be,” says IEA executive director Fatih Birol, “to be on track to reach net zero by 2050, and thus stay within 1.5C. Clean energy investments in the last two years have seen a staggering 40% increase.” Birol says he is now much more optimistic than he was just two years ago.

To stay on track, the IEA recommends a tripling of renewables by 2030, a 75% cut in methane leaks from oil and gas facilities (methane is a very powerful greenhouse gas), and that no new oil and gas projects should be built on the road to net zero by 2050. Big, but entirely possible.

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INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES LEAD

Did you know that there are almost 2000 indigenous-led renewable energy projects across Canada? They vary in size from small, to medium to large income generating projects, mostly solar but also

wind and geothermal.

Large or small, “indigenous clean energy” is becoming quite a thing.

This is driven in part by the cost of running many of these communities on expensive diesel fuel, making them big carbon emitters. Solar, wind and geothermal require no fuel to run, so they are not only reducing their carbon footprint but saving big money too.

So the climate situation is not all bad, but it’s not all good either. I guess some things never change...