

Urgency of Climate Action Big, Small

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

On Monday August 9, 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released their Sixth Assessment Report regarding the current state of climate change. Our prospects of stopping global warming and extreme weather are grim. (<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>) There are several excellent summaries of the report, which in its full length is approximately 1300 pages. "The new report is part of the sixth major assessment of climate science from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which was created in 1988. A second report, set to be released in 2022, will detail how climate change might affect aspects of human society, such as coastal cities, farms or health care systems. A third report, also expected next year, will explore more fully strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and halt global warming." (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/09/climate/climate-change-report-ipcc-un.html>)

It is time to take massive action. The NY Times article includes striking photos of the water levels in 2021 at Lake Oroville in California, and in 2020. This is only one year, folks. The 2020 photo shows a full lake with lush green vegetation along the shores. The August 2021 photo looks like Mars.

Given the grim nature of the report it would be easy to throw up our hands in anguish, feeling that nothing we do makes a difference. We must not give in to this hopeless feeling.

Think how bad things might be in the US if it had not been for the brave conservationists who insisted on clean air and water in the 1970's, when rivers were literally burning due to toxic waste dumping of unregulated industry. (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/cuyahoga-river-caught-fire-least-dozen-times-no-one-cared-until-1969-180972444/>) Individuals banded together, Earth Day was born, and our government listened. The EPA was formed, the clean air and water acts were enacted and signed into law.

Much more recently children took action, inspired by 15 year old Greta Thunberg in 2018, to protest the policies that are causing our hurtle toward planetary climate disaster, and to insist on action, not just talk. (<https://fridaysforfuture.org/>) Climate deniers told these kids to "chill out" and tried to roll back hundreds of significant, yet many small, steps which added up to major environmental improvements. Denver in the late 1970's had air quality so bad a local band distributed a T-shirt printed with "I Smell You Denver." One could only see the top of the Denver skyline, a lot like what we are experiencing in 2021 with the wildfire smoke. Thanks to the "small step" of the Clean Air Act, Denver and other cities have enjoyed much better air quality in the years since the enactment of that legislation.

Science and technology available to us now is exponentially better than in the 1970's. Scientists are able to pinpoint local and regional details of cause and effect. This will help policymakers justify actions and policies which are clearly connected to their specific populations. The IPCC released an interactive atlas along with the report Monday, allowing the ability to see how countries could be transformed at different levels of warming. (<https://interactive-atlas.ipcc.ch/>) As the NY Times overview states "Not all is lost, however, and humanity can still prevent the planet from getting even hotter. Doing so would require a coordinated effort among countries to stop adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere by around 2050, which would entail a rapid shift away from fossil fuels starting immediately, as well as potentially removing vast amounts of carbon from the air. If that happened, global warming would likely halt and level off at around 1.5 degrees Celsius, the report concludes."

Anguish and inaction is not an option. Each of us can make individual choices, which added together with the choices of our neighbors, our states and our nations will create millions of impactful actions.

Beck, Thomas W. "Urgency of Climate Action Big, Small", *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday August 13, 2021, page 5A