



News Analysis

Global warming: we all can do our part to improve environment

By April Galarza

In the 1940s American citizens cooperated with the government to transform the nation into an effective war machine. Crucial materials needed to build tanks and B-52 bombers such as rubber and tin were collected for the cause. The government rationed gasoline and enlisted existing factories to build tanks, planes, and other military supplies. Families planted victory gardens to sustain themselves and leave provisions for the troops. Each citizen found ways to support the war cause and, because of this nationwide commitment, the country helped win World War II.

Today, we face an enemy a thousand times more destructive than Nazi Germany or any war. The threat is global and will not leave any human unaffected. This generation's call to action is global warming.

Earth's natural climate balance has been upset, causing unintended consequences that may prove disastrous. Over the last ten years a chunk of ice the size of California has melted from Antarctica. The world wide average temperature has risen, and we are starting to witness dramatic changes in weather patterns such as more violent hurricanes and greater drought, flooding, and heat waves.

If we continue polluting the environment and do not adjust our style of living, scientists predict that by 2015 the polar ice caps and Greenland could melt, causing a 20-foot rise in sea levels. New York, San Francisco, and one-third of Florida would be submerged under the ocean along with countless other coastal communities worldwide.

Hurricane Mitch killed 11,000 people and left 1.5 million homeless. Katrina killed 1,800 and left more than 200,000 homeless or displaced. If extreme weather continues, global warming refugees could number well more than 100 million in the coming decades.



Al Gore in the movie An Inconvenient Truth explains the effect of global warming on disasters like Hurricane Katrina.

Not just the coasts

The effects are not limited to coastal communities. Midwesterners would suffer heat waves far more severe than the one in Chicago in 1995 that killed 600 people. Such heat spells could last up to ten days and reach temperatures above 125° F.

Beyond personal discomfort, these high temperatures would create longer warm seasons that could increase airborne diseases such as malaria as well as droughts that could lead to more forest and prairie fires.

Preventing these outcomes requires large scale societal change, including dramatic shifts in how we live, work, travel, and produce energy. We also must reevaluate the products we use and make our planet's health our top priority.

Midwesterners have a special stake in climate change action because this region creates 20% of the nation's CO2 pollution and 5 % of the world's pollution. According to the Environmental Law and Policy Center, "The Midwest alone is responsible for more global warming pollution than any country in the world other than China, the former Soviet Union, India, and Japan." These consequences stem mostly from our large concentration of coal burning power plants; conversely, if the Midwest lowers its airborne emissions, it can have a considerable positive effect on the region and the entire globe.

If today's Americans can bring forth the same level of energy, devotion, and ingenuity they applied to the World War II effort, they could transform our nation into a "green machine" within the next few years. We can fund training for a generation of energy professionals who can discover innovative renewable energy solutions and then commit resources to bring those solutions to all citizens. We can re-tool factories to create hybrid cars and energy

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Up

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efficient products. We can establish reliable widespread public transportation. We can ensure construction of new and refurbished infrastructure is built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards. Most important, we can hold our legislators responsible to ensure changes are made as quickly as possible.

Individual responsibility

On an individual level, if every American simply replaced all his or her incandescent light bulbs with compact florescent light bulbs, we could reduce carbon emissions by 5%. In March 2007, Mayor Richard M. Daley announced the City's intentions to give away 500,000 of these "smart bulbs" to Chicago residents; they can be obtained at Alderman's offices throughout the city. Visit the City of Chicago Department of Environment website, www.cityofchicago.org/environment, for details.

Becoming more energy efficient not only saves the planet but saves money. Some ways to achieve both these aims are making sure your house is well insulated, buying only energy efficient appliances and electronics, and putting an insulated cover on your water heater. Keeping the thermostat low in the winter and high in the summer cuts heating and electric costs; installing a programmable thermostat to monitor the temperature can help. The more energy we save, the less CO₂ we are personally responsible for.

We can reduce personal dependence on gasoline (not to mention avoid paying exorbitant prices to fill our tanks) by driving less, walking, biking, and taking public transportation whenever possible. Combining all your errands in one trip and car pooling also help.

Finally, we can pledge to educate ourselves and the people we know about global warming and its dangers. The film documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is a great place to start.

Individual effort will not be enough, however.

"It is beyond the power of individuals alone to change our situation, but it is not beyond individuals to become politically active," said Tim Montague, executive director of the Environmental Research Foundation and contributing editor to *Rachel's News*, an environmental watch dog group named after Rachel Carson, author of the landmark book *Silent Spring* and mother of the modern environmental movement.

Cooperative effort

Success requires a cooperative effort among citizens, businesses, and government to make the major changes needed. Here in the Midwest, such a coalition could take immediate steps to shut down some of our eleven coal burning power plants and convert them to wind and solar plants.



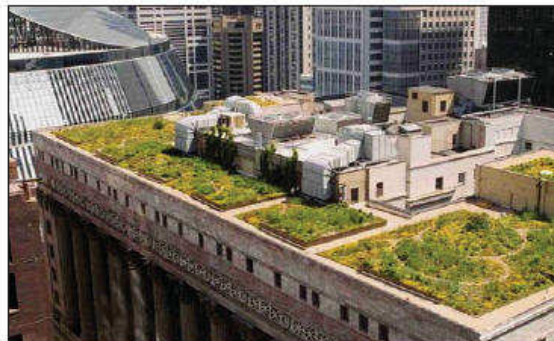
Locals would like to shut down the Fisk Generating Station at 1111 W. Cermak Rd.

The Little Village Environmental Justice Organization is working on a clean power campaign by pressuring the Fisk Generating Station at 1111 W. Cermak Rd. and the Crawford Generating Station at 3501 S. Pulaski Rd. to stop polluting the air with CO₂, mercury, and other harmful emissions. The organization wants to transform one of the facilities into a renewable energy educational center.

Our region can take another crucial step by expanding and improving public transportation on Amtrak, Metra, and Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) trains and buses. The CTA recently unveiled 20 hybrid buses that produce only 60% of the emissions of regular buses. According to Chicago's 2006 Environmental Action Plan, many of its municipal vehicles have been replaced with hybrids. The City intends to put 1,000 hybrids on the street by 2010 and to cut emissions 50% by 2020.

The 2006 Environmental Action Plan highlights numerous green initiatives concerning air quality, brownfield reclamation, energy conservation, urban heat island mitigation, and recycling. The Chicago Green Roofs Grants program, for example, gives grants to people and businesses building environmentally beneficial roof top gardens. Green roofs insulate buildings, reduce energy needs, absorb CO₂, create more oxygen, and reduce the urban heat island effect by cooling the air.

Several independent organizations throughout the Chicago area support conservation, including the Center for Urban Transformation, Angelic Organics, the 8th Day Center for Justice, and Climate Justice Chicago; their websites are listed below. Members educate the public, host events such as educational film screenings, and lobby officials to pass environmentally sound legislation. Their main goal is creating a society in which benefits to people, the planet, and profit are considered and acted upon equally.



The Chicago Green Roofs Grants program provides grants for those building environmentally beneficial roof top gardens.

Addressing global warming will require endurance and sacrifice—qualities Americans are known for. Throughout history we have banded together to overcome difficult challenges. Although climate change is spreading rapidly, we can prevent some of the most catastrophic disasters by acting now.

As anthropologist Margaret Meade, said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Climate change online resources:

www.climatejusticechicago.org, Climate Justice Chicago

www.8thdaycenter.org, 8th Day Center for Justice

www.lvejo.org, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization.

<http://epa.gov/climatechange>, EPA Climate Change Site

<http://epa.gov/climatechange/kids>, EPA Climate Change for Kids

www.climatecrisis.net, *An Inconvenient Truth*

www.stopglobalwarming.org, online march to stop global warming

www.globalwarmingsolutions.org, Midwest Global Warming Information

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_warming, detailed scientific explanation of global warming

www.cityofchicago.org/environment, City of Chicago Department of Environment

