

Episcopal Public Policy Network
For the Beauty of the Earth

Everyday Emissions and Climate Change

"... [I]t's possible for us to act unjustly in relation to future generations; to privilege our own interests and concerns over those of our children and grandchildren. The crisis that is threatened by climate change at the moment is a crisis of that kind. We are being shown, more clearly perhaps than we could have imagined ten or twenty years ago, we are being shown how easy it is to be unjust, unfair to our children and grandchildren."

- Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams

Planes, trains, automobiles, power plants, our homes and even the cattle farm down the road all contribute to climate change. But, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions have always been in our atmosphere. Why is it a problem now? What are the solutions? As Christians and Episcopalians, what is our role and responsibility in reducing every day emissions?

What are "emissions?"

Emissions come from nearly every aspect of human activity on the planet. The most common greenhouse gases or emissions are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and ozone. In the United States, electricity generation accounts for the largest source of emissions—32 percent in 2004. Transportation is next with 28 percent and industry at 20 percent. Agriculture and commercial operations are responsible for 7 percent of emissions each and residential homes account for six percent of our nations emissions.

Why are emissions a problem now?

Most scientists who have studied climate trends believe global greenhouse emissions began increasing just after the start of the industrial revolution. In the past few decades carbon dioxide levels have begun to grow significantly.

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/climate>

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In 2005, carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels climbed to a record high of 7.9 billion tons, an increase of some 3 percent from the previous year. Increasing world populations, industrial development and the mass production of gasoline-powered vehicles have increased consumption of fossil fuels and development responsible for the dramatic increase of greenhouse gas emissions to an unsustainable level. Unfortunately, the United States is historically the largest emitter of greenhouse gases worldwide contributing about a quarter of total emissions. The earth has reached a tipping point. The result: the world is warming threatening the human populations and natural ecosystems if we do nothing.

What are the solutions?

“Big-picture” solutions start with the conservation of our natural resources, reduced consumption of fossil fuels, development of renewable sources of energy and in urging our elected officials to commit to these priorities. One of the biggest reductions in emissions will come in the increasing of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards.

But what can I do?

There are lots of answers to what we as Episcopalians can do individually to reduce emissions. Numerous resources exist and apply to the many different contexts that we experience in our common life. Here are some answers from a variety of sources:

Lenten Action: *Raising Awareness*

This week do an energy audit of your home. One great site to help you do this is: <http://hes.lbl.gov>

You may be surprised at the places where you make small changes and have a big impact on your energy usage.

Your parish can also conduct an energy audit. The Regeneration Project and the Interfaith Power and Light campaign has information for parishes interested in clean energy:

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