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455 PPM And Counting...

By John Blair

12 October, 2007
Dissident Voice

Recent reports from Australia saying that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) final Assessment due out Nov. 7 will show that we have already eclipsed the CO2 concentration of 450 PPM CO2, that we had previously hoped to remain under. The report will show that we have played the waiting game for too long. It will show that the **politicians introducing mediocre measures** for hopeful mitigation that will take decades to accomplish is simply too little too late.

The time has come to take the gloves off in the way we treat the politicians and people who continue to acquiesce to the industries and those responsible for staying this apparently do nothing course.

Sure it is important to reduce our emissions of CO2 by at least 80% by 2050 but reaching that goal some 42 years from today will leave us in a huge quandary as a species unless we begin to make substantial headway in those reductions immediately.

From my perspective that means:

1. We must universally call for a moratorium on all new coal plants, whether they claim to be Capture and Sequestration ready or not. The only exception might be the FutureGen facility which is the taxpayer funded project designed to demonstrate the veracity of their claim of zero emissions. All other coal proposals should be universally opposed if we are going to make any headway in this most serious issue. It is certain that no new coal plants should be built unless they are not only equipped but can capture 100% of their carbon emissions and store them permanently.

2. Existing coal plants should be completely phased out over the next twenty years, beginning with the oldest first, while allowing research on ways to capture the carbon emissions from those newer plants. Once, we have proven that pulverized coal can be adapted for carbon capture, then we must use the demonstrated technology to sequester it that is proven by FutureGen to immediately capture and store the carbon from those plants. If it is not economical or physically practical to do that, then those plants should also be taken out of service, perhaps mothballed until the economics or the technology allows then to return to service without emitting carbon.

3. We must undertake a massive program to educate people of the seriousness of the climate change issue and the importance of their personal commitment to conserving energy and reducing their personal carbon footprint. We need to change the paradigm that conservation is some relic from 1975 or World War 2 and that the only way that we can maintain even a semblance of our current wasteful lifestyles will be to eliminate wasteful consumption and attitudes universally throughout the world.

4. We must demand increased production and end-use energy efficiency, pushing congress to pass mandatory efficiency standards that are significantly higher than those in place today. While the market should probably force the necessary changes, once we have accomplished #3, it will probably require some sort of government backed "incentives" to encourage development of new technologies that will supplant existing wasteful living.

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5. As people who are demanding a better way, we, the environmental movement, should set a major example for the rest of the world and declare that we will not have a single new conference on global warming that does not incorporate video conferencing so that we do not have to travel long distances to discuss how others should cut back on their carbon emissions. The first video conference I attended was in 1991. It worked then and is significantly better now. We could all equip our own personal work stations with the hardware and software necessary to permit this sort of advance in our mission. Tell me why twenty or two hundred people should hop on airplanes and travel to some distant city to discuss the seriousness of any problem when we can do the same function electronically?

To accomplish the partial solutions I have outlined, my group, Valley Watch offers the following two campaigns for your perusal and use.

CONSERVATION IS COOL!

There is something wrong when the slightest mention of the word conservation brings admonishment from environmental leaders just because some uninformed focus group thought that conservation conjured up images of jimmy Carter sitting by the fireplace in his cardigan sweater asking us to personally sacrifice to save energy. Frankly, I wish we had a leader like that today who would tell the truth even though it might hurt him/her politically.

By changing the paradigm to Conservation is Cool! and getting all those celebrities who pledge to help us win this battle to join in, we can make a certain level of personal sacrifice seem not only like a duty but also a blessing. Once people begin thinking about ways to Conserve, then a whole new generation will understand that waste is no longer an option.

Such a paradigm shift could yield huge economic opportunity with its decentralized production and consumption of goods and services. We may even find that such an "ethic" actually yields reduced reliance on fossil fuels and thus might even promote peace as well as prosperity. Wouldn't that be a huge dividend?

20X10

To prod people toward a more Conservative path of consumption and to eliminate waste, Valley Watch has initiated a program where we solicit personal commitments from people to cut their personal energy use by 20% by the year 2010.

If you think that is too lofty a goal, my experience say that it is not. For years, I have made the easy efforts to Conserve electricity and gas for home heating. I thought I was doing pretty well until I started telling whoever would listen that they should cut their own consumption of energy if they wanted to have a decent world for their grand kids.

Hoping not to be perceived as a hypocrite, I made my own commitment to reducing my energy consumption by 20X10. Guess what, it did not take anywhere near three years. I was able to do that much by simply consolidating trips, replacing incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps and by using my head, looking for additional ways to conserve. Turn out the lights, Stupid!

My energy consumption at home has been reduced between 25 and 30% in 2007 over 2006. My lifestyle has only changed in the fact that I wear sweaters and jackets in the winter and use less air conditioning in the summer. Actually, my family has not used our air conditioner for the last five summers, but that is another story.

Frankly, there has been NO sacrifice involved in this effort. Now, I am trying to afford an EnergyStar refrigerator which could put me over the 30% mark when I do.

My point is this, since we have already passed the threshold we hoped to hold greenhouse gas concentrations to by 2050, it is time for serious action. It is time for serious policy and it is time for a level of personal commitment from all of earth's human population to reduce their use of fossil fuels.

We've already gone past the tipping point, now it is a matter of the survival of our species and all the others that share on this earth. If we cannot make those personal choices to protect ourselves and our progeny, we certainly do not deserve the mantel of dominion over this earth and we will likely perish from it as a result.

Sometimes such choices are hard but I would rather give myself a choice because doing so at least gives our kids a chance.

John Blair is a longtime environmental health advocate who serves as president of **Valley Watch** in Evansville, IN. He is also a Pulitzer Prize winning photographer and freelance writer.

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