



## Guest Opinion: Cut Carbon Emissions or Face the Consequences

By Gregory Kingsley  
March 4, 2014

It is a sad sight sitting next to a fellow human in recovery with the terminally pale jaundice of cirrhosis or chained to an oxygen tank. They have admitted their problems and faults, worked very hard to repair the negative consequences, and made amends to those they had harmed. But, it is too late, the physical damage cannot be reversed. Perhaps, had they changed a mere 20 years ago, or 10, they could have had a real life ... perhaps.

And now we, the human race may be sitting in much the same unlucky chair. Ignoring all warning signs, the constant hacking and wheezing, uncontrollable blood pressure and blood sugar; all living systems under grave duress, we carry on as if nothing was amiss. "I'll have another glass of oil, please, to wash down my coal fillet."

We are like the crab waiting quietly at the bottom of a pot of warming water. They will sit there doing nothing as the temperature slowly rises to cook them. Pearl Harbor, Bird Flu and 9/11 caused our cringing and reaction, but climate change and its ominous evil twin, ocean acidification, are vague realities, like the thought of dying of old age when you are 23, or the very real yet remote chance of being struck by lightning. The enemy is not a single dragon to be slain, it is omnipresent and within us. Its threat is slowly creeping and its solution will require small and large sacrifices everywhere until we can make sufficient changes.

In most cultures throughout the world, this rare and amazing planet is rightly viewed as a mother figure giving us life that is almost incomprehensible to imagine, should we ever give pause to. For whatever reasons, or lavish tales to which we may prescribe, our earth creates and nourishes life of all kinds and as yet we know of no other. And now, the one form of life capable of its own destruction has found the means; not through the big bombs that make us cringe and resist, but the small sins of our petty ways.

Comparing heroin to oil does not do justice to its potent power, it does, however, illuminate the crippling dependency and, consequentially, painful process of cessation and recovery. Oil, like heroin, feels really good. It transports us wherever we want to go or brings us anything we want. It heats and bathes us, feeds and clothes us, entertains us and permits us a life of blissful distraction. But, like heroin, we need more and more just to get by, and that escalating necessity eventually kills us. Obviously, we cannot simply quit the fossil fuels that have created our

modern life. Recovery, however, depends firstly that we admit we have a problem. Adding foresight to scientific evidence we can see that yes, life is slowly becoming unmanageable.

As ice caps melt, oceans rise. As heat is displaced, storm systems intensify. As climatic weather systems change, droughts and fires prevail in some areas, where floods and mudslides occur in others. Although the rise of a mere two degrees seems an insignificant amount, it seriously changes everything. In a world settled by 7 billion people, climate chaos or climate upheaval are more adequate terms than global warming, which all too often suggests a nice day at the beach.

In our country, a powerful propaganda machine has mobilized and paralyzed all hope of objective discourse. Conservative values, once admired for the virtues of financial discipline and hard work, have been hijacked by a powerful machine designed only to divert wealth from the citizenry toward a tiny minority of oligarchs at the top; the billionaires and their wannabes. 85 individuals now own the same portion of the world's wealth as 3.5 billion people! Half of the world in the hands of less than 100 humans.

The flow of wealth is piped upward while the propaganda pipeline flows down, flooding the unawares with prefabricated ideas, prejudices and anger via well-funded media outlets like Fox News and think tanks such as the CATO Institute. A lobbying factory lounge, ALEC, delivers assembly line legislation to all levels of government, aimed at reviving medieval feudalism and dismantling all public protections. They appeal to familiar American values of patriotism, religion and individualism for their singular goal: the absolute extraction of all wealth from any source and by any means.

Rather than respond with open-minded concern, players like the Koch brothers and ExxonMobil have pumped millions of dollars into discrediting climate science and convincing the American people that a problem simply does not exist. Using the media, they have been very successful in convincing over 60 percent of the American public that climate change is not caused by our dumping of carbon into the atmosphere. For industries that simply extract, process and deliver a free resource that everyone must have, the profits from alternative technologies are unappealing. Again like heroin, oil profits are too good to be true.

Consider that 97 percent of climate scientists around the world now agree on the causes and effects of climate change. It's time we decide that yes, the world is round and let the flat earth society meet on their own plane; take with them the 137 congress members elected to govern our country that are known as "climate change deniers." Nothing can be as absurd as the evangelical representative driving his (science based) Cadillac to a fundamentalist fundraiser while talking on his (science based) cell phone. He transmits his medieval beliefs anywhere in the world in real time; the world is 6,000 years old and must be completely harvested for man's divinity; science is wrong and must be unfunded, pure and simple. The American Taliban, alive and well, permeating into our public spaces a vitriolic ideology, violating the separation of church and state.

In 2012 we pumped 35.6 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into the atmosphere, up 2.6 percent from the previous year; every American is responsible for 22 tons per person per year. For the first time in human history, carbon levels have surpassed 400 ppm. Levels in the 1700s were 270-280

ppm. Through ice core testing we know for a fact that carbon levels haven't been anywhere this high in 800,000 years and probably not since the Pliocene Epoch, 3-5 million years ago. We don't know what specifically the changes will be or even how catastrophic. We do know that the changes are happening so fast that very few species will have time to adapt. But let's not get distracted by the vast array of speculated possibilities that our atmosphere may produce; lest we become paralyzed by the uncertainties. Let us focus on the terrifying, easily tested facts at hand; those lying wait in our oceans.

Probably, our more severe atmospheric changes have to date been cushioned by the oceans having now absorbed over 25 percent of the carbon dioxide so far released by our activities. The pH balance of our combined oceans has plummeted from 8.2 to 8.1, a 30 percent drop. Carbon dioxide combines with seawater to create carbonic acid, which is highly corrosive. Simply put, shellfish can no longer produce shells. This effect has already impacted the oyster beds of the Pacific Northwest now experiencing as much as an 80 percent die-off rate.

While it may be possible for our atmosphere to right itself if we are able to reduce carbon emissions before we reach a tipping point, the oceans will not reverse so easily — possibly not within 1,000 years. The damage is done, period. This is the emergency. This is why we must mobilize immediately. And this is the argument we should hold steadfast to.

You are one person among almost 7 billion who are contributing to the simmering carbon suicide. If you influence 10 people who do the same, then tell 10 more and soon you will end up with conversion rates that can change the world.

You have a voice, a vote, a dollar to decide on, and the means to displace carbon in almost everything you do. Assuming you have a retirement plan, you manage your finances as your own private business, your recreational habits, spirituality, church and exercise routines; raising kids are all departments of your life — separate departments of a fully integrated life.

Add to your busy schedule the carbon department. Your portfolio might include purchasing products that are committed to green practices of buying local, recycling and reusing, weatherization and conservation. When you fly to Seattle, displacing about the same amount of carbon as driving a Hummer the same distance, you take the kids out and plant a dozen trees to compensate. Changing old bad habits doesn't have to be painful and impoverishing. It just has to be, that's all.

Although carbon is central to everything produced and achieved in our modern life, generally, the individual directly produces carbon through heating, cooling and transportation, all areas that are easily reduced on the personal level with small habit changes. Our speed of consumption does not have to match the speed of production to satisfy sponsors that grow our 401(k)'s. What future plans and past investments has your local utility made in renewables and conservation efforts? What about public buildings? City buses? Do all the lights have to be on all the time?

Look into the products you buy and the stores you buy them from. Do their practices and profits result in environmental wreckage? Are they conscious of the free public air and water and land they alter in order to seduce profits? Become a sleuth, do the detective work. Find out who is

naughty and who is nice. Follow that busy dollar bill and make sure it has a clean journey as it tramps about this once pristine planet.

We can do this or we can explain to the next generations that, with all the evidence before us, we chose to do nothing.

Enjoy the ruins we played so hard to leave you.