

The IPCC Code Red Climate Change Alert – Make a Difference by Taking Action

The huge problems described in the recent Climate Change report from the IPCC makes it seem like only governments and big companies could possibly make a dent in mitigating climate change. In reality, though, the small actions each of us take can have a big impact. From riding the bus to lobbying legislators, what you do can slow climate change.

The Situation seems Dire

The problems described in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report called Climate Change 2021 that was released in August do seem so huge that what any one person does might not seem to make a real difference.

The IPCC said the scale of recent changes across the climate system are unprecedented over many centuries. Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur. Increases in hot extremes, marine heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts and tropical cyclones as well as reductions in Arctic sea ice, snow cover and permafrost may well happen.

In Singapore, for example, the Centre for Climate Research Singapore said the report suggests that an increase in flooding is a possibility. The BBC noted that seas could rise up to 2 metres by 2100. Solving these problems sounds too daunting for any one person.

The reaction policymakers also sound dire. The report is a "code red for humanity," as UN Secretary-General António Guterres describes it. "The alarm bells are deafening. This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy our planet."

Experts say governments need to act fast. Greg Flato, a senior scientist with Environment and Climate Change Canada, told *The Straits Times* that countries must rapidly embrace electric vehicles, more efficient buildings, greener cities and much more efficient agriculture. Since just 100 companies are accountable for more than 70 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, as Slate writer Yana Pashaeva noted, a focus on changing how large firms operate is essential.

Desperate as the situation sounds, though, the BBC opined that the last thing climate experts and policymakers want is for people to feel so hopeless that they give up and tune out. As Duke University climate policy expert Katherine Konschnik told the *Los Angeles Times*, bad news on a global scale "can be really disempowering because it's frightening and feels too big."

Each One of us can Do Our Part

Even though the problem is big, experts also told the *Los Angeles Times* that changes by individuals can move the needle and that doing something to reduce our carbon footprint is better than doing nothing, so long as the strategy is well-thought-out.

While it's true that personal actions won't eliminate carbon dioxide emissions entirely. Pashaeva said individuals can still play a vital role in slowing climate change. That change is especially important for people who live in wealthy countries and who are responsible for more carbon emissions than the average citizen. Indeed, Lund University associate professor Kimberly Nicholas found that people with an income over \$38,000 a year cause about half of all household climate pollution.

The key question, then, is what each of us can do.

The greatest impact from individuals may well come from advocating for change. Individuals can put pressure on corporations and policymakers to make rapid cuts on planet-heating emissions, Joeri Rogelj, a lead author for the UN report's chapter on global carbon cycles, told CNN. They can also talk to decision-makers and let them know that this is an issue that they care about by writing letters, Rogelj said. Lawmakers may then feel compelled to do more to hold industry accountable for its role in perpetuating the crisis. As

activist Greta Thunberg told Reuters, the public and media need to put "massive" pressure on governments to act.

At work, Greenbiz contributor Aman Singh suggests, it is essential to connect the dots between professional decisions, actions and our choices with the reality at hand by looking at what teams can do differently. Managers can start lunch-and-learns about climate change, for example, or create campaigns to encourage more sustainable habits. Talking about climate change at community events can help too.

At an individual level, the National Resources Defence Council (NRDC) suggests that consumers buy less plastic, install LED lightbulbs, and use more public transport. "Most important, it's about knowing that every action we take to fight climate change matters." Media company Electrek suggests that consumers switch to renewables, drive electric cars, plant more trees, take public transport and waste less food. "Our biggest threat is inaction. Take personal responsibility and do what you can."

Admittedly, individual actions such as changing lightbulbs and buying less plastic alone won't address the full scale of the problem. Collectively, though, they play a part and can be the catalyst for a solution. As *Climate Courage* author Andreas Karelis explained, "We need to start small and focus on easy-to-achieve targets. With each success, we'll build momentum. The small but meaningful actions that people can take, cities can take, companies can take, elected officials can take, get that process started." Our small individual actions can be the start of a big change.