

We Must Act
for an
Environmentally
Sustainable
Future

Climate Change is Real

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Climate Change is Real

Despite the self-interested claims of some politicians, the evidence is incontrovertible: climate change is real and induced by human activity.

The impacts of climate change are already being felt around the world. The science shows that the Earth is now approximately 1°C warmer than it was during pre-industrial society.¹ As a result, we are seeing increased incidence of devastating hurricanes in the US, record droughts in many areas of the world, and devastating forest fires here at home.

The October 2018 report from the world's leading climate scientists is a desperate call to action. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that we have only a dozen years to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C. Should global temperature warming rise above that mark, the risk of drought, floods, and extreme heat will increase significantly. The impact for the world's people, most notably poor and vulnerable populations, will be serious and, in many cases, catastrophic.

A key insight from the report is the extent of the damage that would be caused by even a small increase in global temperatures. The IPCC authors note that if the rise in global temperatures can be kept at 1.5°C, the proportion of the world's people exposed to water stress could be 50% lower than if global temperatures rise by 2°C. Furthermore, food scarcity would be minimized and the number of people who would be at risk of climate-related poverty would be reduced by hundreds of millions.²

The IPCC report emphasizes the need for urgent and widespread systemic changes in order to reach the ambitious targets of the Paris Agreement, in which parties pledged to cap the global temperature increase between 1.5°C and 2°C.³ Importantly, the report's authors say that such action remains affordable and feasible at this time. Debra Roberts, co-chair of the working group on impacts, says of the report:

It's a line in the sand and what it says to our species is that this is the moment and we must act now. This is the largest clarion bell from the science community, and I hope it mobilises people and dents the mood of complacency.⁴

There is already a blueprint in place to respond to the destructive reality of climate change. In December 2015, 185 countries adopted the Paris Agreement, an international treaty that entered into force on November 4, 2016. It commits to addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gases (GHGs), the main contributor to climate change, to limit global warming to between 1.5°C and 2°C above preindustrial levels.

Canada needs to be a world leader in efforts to combat climate change. Not only are we a major contributor of greenhouse gas emissions, but also, as recent reports indicate, we have a lot at risk.

A recent study commissioned by Environment and Climate Change Canada, entitled *Canada's Changing Climate Report (CCCR)*, shows that Canada is, on average, warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world. Since 1948, Canada's annual average temperature over land has warmed by 1.7°C, with higher rates in the North, the Prairies, and Northern BC. By way of comparison, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that since 1948, global average temperatures have increased by about 0.8°C. Even more worrisome is the fact that Northern Canada is seeing its temperatures rise at almost 3 times the global average, with the annual average temperature increasing 2.3°C since 1948.⁵

As many have pointed out, the impact of climate change will be felt by some communities more than others. In particular, Indigenous peoples will experience the effects more than others. The Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) interviewed Eriel Deranger of Indigenous Climate Action, and she made the following points:

'And the reality is that Indigenous communities, land-based communities have literally been on the front lines of advocating for, nurturing and preserving, the biodiversity of this planet since time immemorial. We have literally been the reason why the planet hasn't hit the tipping point,'...pointing out that 80 percent of the world's biodiversity is within recognized Indigenous lands and territories.⁶

In connection to the rising temperature, Canada is experiencing increases in precipitation, particularly in winter, "extreme fire weather" and water-supply shortages in summer, and a heightened risk of coastal flooding. While the CCCR sees warming in Canada as the result of both human activity and natural variations in the climate, the human factor is dominant especially with respect to GHGs.⁷

Unfortunately, many politicians have chosen continued corporate profits over the well-being of the planet and its people. We need a growing movement of people demanding that governments act now to prevent a climate catastrophe. We are starting to see such a movement, led by the world's youth, gather momentum. Greta Thunberg, a sixteen-year-old from Sweden, sparked a global wave of student strikes in protest over the lack of climate action. In her speech to the 2019 World Economic Forum, Thunberg said,

Adults keep saying: 'We owe it to the young people to give them hope.' But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.

I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.⁸

The National Union echoes this call for urgent action. We believe that a climate catastrophe can be prevented! We are committed to working to reduce GHGs to limit global temperature rising to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

We also believe that climate action requires more than solely aiming to reduce GHGs. Human activity has wrought great devastation on many parts of the planet. These numerous climate issues must be accounted for in a comprehensive agenda to combat climate change.

¹ <https://climateanalytics.org/briefings/global-warming-reaches-1c-above-preindustrial-warmest-in-more-than-11000-years/>

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

³ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-mustnot-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report>

⁵ https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/energy/Climate-change/pdf/CCCR_FULLREPORT-EN-FINAL.pdf

⁶ <https://aptnews.ca/2018/10/17/literally-life-and-death-indigenous-climate-leaders-critical-of-canadas-response-to-climate-change-report/>

⁷ https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/energy/Climate-change/pdf/CCCR_FULLREPORT-EN-FINAL.pdf

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/davos-greta-thunberg-climate-change-global-warming-a8746536.html>



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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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