



# Tackling the Climate Crisis: Towards a Just, Sustainable, and Public Future

Climate Action Matters to Working People

June 2023

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 13 Components unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 425,000 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.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done. And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Bert Blundon, President

Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer

## Climate Change is Here

Climate change is arguably the biggest challenge we, as a society and as a world, face. Climate change is real: the science is unequivocal that climate change is caused by human activity.<sup>1</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), made up of the world's leading climate scientists, has estimated that human activities—specifically, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions—have caused global warming of 1.0 °C above pre-industrial levels.<sup>2</sup> While it may seem like a small number, the effects are devastating.

Climate change is not a distant threat. It is here and already having devastating impacts on our ecosystems and communities.<sup>3</sup> Canada is experiencing warming 2 times faster than the global average, and 3 times faster in the Arctic.<sup>4</sup> In the last few years alone, there are countless examples of the impacts. Between severe wildfires and flooding, heat waves and drought, food insecurity, melting sea ice and permafrost, and air and water pollution, communities right across the country are experiencing the effects of climate change.

## Workers and Communities on the Front Lines

The climate emergency is impacting workers in their jobs, as NUPGE members know first-hand. Our members include health care professionals caring for those affected by pollution and extreme weather. They include wildland firefighters facing longer and more severe seasons and highway maintenance workers repairing damaged roads. Then there are the social service workers providing care and support to the vulnerable populations affected disproportionately. In addition, there are the civil servants who are responsible for implementing environmental protections, keeping the public informed during crises, and carrying out various support programs for people. And there are many more examples.

Addressing the climate crisis matters to workers—as workers and as members of their communities. They are experiencing these effects and are worried about the future.

Not everyone is affected equally. The impacts of climate change disproportionately affect Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour (BIPOC), people with disabilities, women, people living in poverty or with low incomes, seniors, and youth. In doing so, the climate crisis threatens to make existing inequities worse, similar to what we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic.

## No Time to Waste

Inaction is not an option. The IPCC has warned that this decade is crucial for reducing emissions to prevent global warming from reaching catastrophic levels.<sup>5</sup> Its latest report, which outlines the current and predicted impacts on ecosystems, human well-being, and the health of the planet, issues “a dire warning about the consequences of inaction.”<sup>6</sup>

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, countries agreed to cut emissions to limit global warming to 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, while aiming for a 1.5 °C limit. According to the United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) *Emissions Gap Report 2021*,

new national climate pledges combined with other mitigation measures put the world on track for a global temperature rise of 2.7 °C by the end of the century. That is well above the goals of the Paris climate agreement and would lead to catastrophic changes in the Earth's climate. To keep global warming below 1.5 °C this century, the aspirational goal of the Paris Agreement, *the world needs to halve annual greenhouse gas emissions in the next eight years* [emphasis added].<sup>7</sup>

People want action too. Several polls,<sup>8</sup> including one commissioned by NUPGE during the 2021 federal election campaign,<sup>9</sup> confirm that the overwhelming majority of Canadians want their governments to pursue stronger climate action. This includes fossil fuel workers, the majority of which support a transition to a net-zero economy and want to see training and other supports for workers.<sup>10</sup> It is the world's wealthy and powerful, including multinational corporations, that are trying to block climate action.<sup>11</sup>

We need governments to step up. Actions at the household, workplace, or community levels to reduce carbon footprints and foster sustainability are important. But we need structural change to address this crisis and transition to a more equitable and sustainable economy. We need governments to intervene to address the scale of this crisis through investing in the green economy, regulating corporations, and ensuring that nobody is left behind. All levels of government must also lead by example and reduce their own carbon footprints.

This backgrounder series focuses on the essential role of the public sector in this effort—in both responding to the effects of climate change and preventing it from getting worse.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> [https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/climate-action/facts-about-climate-emergency;](https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/climate-action/facts-about-climate-emergency)  
<https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>
- <sup>2</sup> [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15\\_Full\\_Report\\_High\\_Res.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> See NUPGE's backgrounder series, We Must Act for an Environmentally Sustainable Future
- <sup>4</sup> [https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/energy/Climate-change/pdf/CCCR\\_FULLREPORT-EN-FINAL.pdf](https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/energy/Climate-change/pdf/CCCR_FULLREPORT-EN-FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15\\_Full\\_Report\\_High\\_Res.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/02/28/pr-wgii-ar6/>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2021>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://climateactionnetwork.ca/2021/10/15/new-poll-reveals-canadians-want-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-to-deliver-on-climate-promises-in-his-first-100-days-in-office/> ;  
<https://abacusdata.ca/climate-change-cop26-canada/> ; <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/canadians-agree-we-need-to-do-more-on-climate> ;
- <sup>9</sup> <https://nupge.ca/content/8-10-voters-want-climate-action>
- <sup>10</sup>  
[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ironandearth/pages/1702/attachments/original/1635867551/1/Abacus - Iron Earth poll July 13 .pdf?1635867551](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ironandearth/pages/1702/attachments/original/1635867551/1/Abacus_-_Iron_Earth_poll_July_13_.pdf?1635867551)
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/19/big-oil-climate-crisis-lobby-group-api> ;  
<https://climateactionnetwork.ca/2021/11/09/statement-responding-to-the-canadian-association-of-petroleum-producers-press-conference-at-cop26/> ;  
<https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/climate-denial-machine-how-fossil-fuel-industry-blocks-climate-action>

# nupge

## COMPONENTS



B.C. GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION



CANADIAN UNION OF BREWERY AND GENERAL WORKERS



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF SASKATCHEWAN



MANITOBA ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS



MANITOBA GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION



NEW BRUNSWICK UNION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EMPLOYEES



NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR ASSOC. OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE EMPLOYEES



NOVA SCOTIA GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES UNION



ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION / SYNDICAT DES EMPLOYÉS DE LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE DE L'ONTARIO



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND UNION OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES



SASKATCHEWAN GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

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