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Cleaning the Future: The Necessity of Accountability in the Years to Come

BY BEN GITZINGER on NOVEMBER 5, 2018 • (1)

For years, people around the globe have foolishly argued whether or not human-generated climate change poses a serious threat to society. In spending an exorbitant amount of time trying to convince those in power that drastic action is needed, the inaction of these individuals might have exacerbated the problem beyond the possibility of recovery. A couple of weeks ago, the [United Nations'](#) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a rather bleak [report](#) regarding the future of the planet. In it, the writers declare that on the current trajectory of industry and air pollution, the goal of the nations in the Paris accord to limit a rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2100 is impossible without drastic [changes](#) in all aspects of society in the next decade. In order to meet this [benchmark](#), CO2 emissions would need to be reduced by 45 percent by 2030 and by 2050 would need to have a net increase of zero, meaning that the same amount of CO2 ejected into the atmosphere would have to be balanced by the amount removed from the air by manufacturers.

If these changes are not made, the IPCC's report projects a global temperature increase of at least 2 degrees Celsius. Now half a [degree](#) may not seem like a lot, but it can still have a drastic impact on the planet. It could mean storms and droughts 33 percent more intense, the extinction of tropical coral reefs, and a reduction of freshwater and crop yield in some areas twice of what would be seen with a 1.5 degree increase.

Even if tomorrow the world ceased to produce carbon emissions, the warming effects would persist for decades because of the carbon already in the atmosphere. Not only will humanity need to limit how much CO2 we emit, but we also need to place large amounts of funding into research on extracting earlier emissions from the atmosphere and disposing of them. And if anyone wants to prevent a 2 degree Celsius increase, then urgent action must be taken.

However, this seems rather unlikely because of the current political climate. President Trump has previously called climate change a [hoax](#) developed by the Chinese meant to intimidate the United States into producing less coal. Whether or not he believes that, it reflects his close ties to big energy companies — both through his political position and from previous business dealings — who would have much to lose if a transition to cleaner energy becomes a priority on the global stage. Regulating emissions in the production process will prove to be expensive, regardless of over how many years the transition may take place.

A recent [report](#) from the Carbon Disclosure Project has shown that 100 companies are responsible for around 71 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. It is preposterous that so few people should be able to harm the planet so disproportionately because they refuse to spend the extra money on researching new technologies. The governments of the world must work toward restricting energy and manufacturing companies in order to curb such exponential and disastrous emissions, especially if there is to be any hope of preventing more than a 1.5 degree Celsius increase.

For a while it seemed that the world was on the right track. Practically every country in the world signed on to the Paris Accord in 2016, a climate agreement wherein each country would work to reduce the percentage of emissions currently produced in order to reduce global warming. However, in 2017, President Trump decided to [withdraw](#) the



Academic – ish.

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U.S. from the agreement, serving as a major **blow** toward hopes for improvement, considering the U.S. is one of the **largest producers** of greenhouse gases, second only to China, and responsible for 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

This year, Trump’s administration has decided to cut the budget of the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) by **72 percent** for the 2019 fiscal year. In more recent months, they have proposed the **suspension** of requirements on automobile manufacturers that their vehicles must become more fuel efficient every year. Most drastically, they have also expressed their intention to **remove** the special authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions given to California, a state that is subject to increasingly dangerous wildfires as a result of climate change.

How does the administration justify these actions? The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has determined in a recent **report** that if no action is taken to combat climate change, the Earth will see a 4 degree increase by 2100. Rather than using this frightening statistic to urge people into action, they cite this figure with the idea that the planet’s fate is already sealed and that there is no reason to attempt to correct this figure. Many conservatives, including Trump himself, normally cite scientists and **sources** that argue the climate is changing only because of natural causes, but the Trump administration appears in this instance to have reversed its position.

What caused them to go from **removing** scholarly articles that supported the idea of human-generated climate change from the Environmental Protection Agency’s website to acknowledging that humans are on a track to drastically alter life on the planet through negligence? President Trump and his team appeared to manipulate the facts, ignoring data that suggest human-generated climate change is an issue until it benefited their agenda to do the opposite.

Ironically, officials are now using the same data as the climate change scientists who urge action but with an interpretation that suggests that no change needs to be made concerning our current behavior. However, just because the process of updating energy production will be costly and expensive doesn’t mean the transition won’t be worth it. In the middle of such a frightening time, it is important that action be taken to minimize the effects of climate change, regardless of its cause. Until politicians who take climate change seriously come into power, it is important that those who are concerned for the planet and for future generations take action and do what they can to raise awareness while something can still be done to protect the world we live in.

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Andy Gitzinger

December 4, 2018 • 12:30 pm

Great article! Good length with great references.

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