

Issues in Climate Change*

Climate change, caused mainly by the burning of fossil fuels, is an emergency unfolding in slow motion. The harms of climate change include increased temperatures, sea level rise, and more extreme events like wildfires. While we can each make individual choices that reduce greenhouse gas pollution, resolving the climate crisis will require policy action at the local, state, and federal level. Katharine Hayhoe's inspiring book "Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World" includes the quote: "The most important thing an individual can do right now is not be such an individual."

Here are some key issues and potential solutions. Where available, San Diego-specific examples and references are supplied.

Increased temperatures

Hotter temperatures endanger the health of people – especially people who work outside or lack access to air conditioning. Heat waves in California are becoming [more deadly](#), especially in vulnerable communities. Increased temperatures also impact supplies of water and food.

Sea level rise

As a coastal city, San Diego is already impacted by sea level rise including [beach loss and coastal cliff erosion](#). Sea level rise and changes in rainfall [increase flood risk and endanger homes and buildings](#).

Wildfires

Wildfires are among the catastrophes that are amplified by climate change. Here in San Diego, wildfires are a particular worry – they put homes and lives at risk, produce air pollution, impact businesses, and create enough risk that [many insurance companies are avoiding issuing new policies in California](#).

Pollution

In addition to the long-term global effects of pollution, air pollution from burning fossil fuels [kills hundreds of thousands of Americans each year](#), and sickens many more. Indoor air pollution from gas stoves is [harmful, especially for children](#).

SOLUTIONS

Carbon Pricing

A [Carbon Fee and Dividend](#) policy charges a fee for fossil fuel pollution, then redistributes the funds to American households to help mitigate the costs of transitioning to a green economy.

*How to use this document:

- Feel free to use some or all of the text above when writing your letter
- For location-specific data, internet searches using each of the issues and bullet points above, followed by the name of your location should be useful.

Some form of price on carbon is likely necessary to address climate change; the [latest IPCC report](#) mentions carbon pricing many times (and specifically recommends carbon fee and dividend)

The fee increases over time to help drive emissions downward. This dividend makes this a progressive tax, where poor and middle-income households come out ahead, receiving more in dividend checks than they pay in increased gas prices. The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (EICDA), which would establish carbon fee and dividend in the US, will (as of 6/20/23) re-introduced in congress soon, and gathering legislative cosponsors and prominent endorsers will help build support to implement carbon fee and dividend here in the US. Canada has a carbon fee and dividend policy in place now; the US could benefit by doing the same.

Here in California, Rep. Muratsuchi introduced AB 858, a bill that would establish a state-level [Climate Cashback Program](#) from existing state funds. Reaching out to state legislators can help build support for climate cashback in the next (2024) legislative session when it's re-introduced.

Clean Energy Permitting Reform

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), as well as other investments in clean energy, can greatly reduce greenhouse gas pollution as we replace burning coal, oil, or natural gas with renewable wind and solar power. However, we may [only get 20% of the potential benefits](#) of the IRA funding unless we can permit and build power generation and transmission much faster than is possible today. Permitting reform done right will speed up the transition away from fossil fuels while still collecting early, robust community input on projects so good projects go forward quickly and bad projects are denied quickly. Here in San Diego, [Scott Peters is a strong and effective advocate](#) for permitting reform.

Permitting reform may speed up approval of some fossil fuel projects as well – but given that the pipeline of new projects is [nearly all renewables](#), permitting reform is a net win of mainly "less red tape, more green power", as well as the transmission needed to carry electricity from where it's produced and stored to where it's needed.

Building Electrification

Buildings are a substantial source of greenhouse gas pollution, especially from natural gas burned to heat them. The group [Rewiring America](#) estimates that America has [a billion machines](#) in need of electrification including household ones like furnaces, water heaters, stoves, dryers, even leaf blowers and lawn mowers. A key consideration is that when a fossil-fueled machine reaches the end of its life, it should be replaced with an electric one. On the bright side, San Diego has [banned natural gas in new construction](#), and now we face the long process of electrifying existing buildings.

The [San Diego Building Electrification Coalition](#) has good resources for local advocacy and for helping electrify your home, including making people aware of benefits from the Inflation Reduction Act they can take advantage of.

Phasing out gas stoves has become a hot-button issue (in part because of gas industry propaganda). But cooking with induction is easy and has the fringe benefits of [making air in the home healthier, especially for children](#) – and after switching away from a gas stove, you don't have to run the noisy vent fan above the oven to have clean kitchen air.

Healthy Forests

Trees draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. [By planting more trees \(and predicting existing forests\), we can draw more carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere each year.](#) Trees also [reduce temperatures in cities](#), helping protect against extreme heat and lowering the need for air conditioning. Trees are also an equity issue – currently some neighborhoods have more tree cover (with the cooling and other benefits trees bring) and some have less; improving tree cover can reduce this gap. Proposed legislation like the [Save Our Sequoias](#) act aims to protect iconic American forests.

Defunding the Fossil Fuel Industry

Fossil fuel companies depend on investors, bankers, and insurers to build new wells and pipelines. Putting pressure on banks and insurers to stop doing business with fossil fuel companies helps cut off the flow of money to fossil fuel extraction. The advocacy group Third Act has [organized campaigns](#) such as writing to your banks.

Resources

[Citizens' Climate Lobby guide to writing letters to the editor](#)

[Third Act training \(with examples\) on letters to the editor](#)

Current revision: 6/21/23