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Reducing greenhouse gases: our position

Why we need to reduce global warming greenhouse gases rapidly: Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland's position.

Summary

[Global warming](#) of more than 1°C since the Industrial Revolution is already causing extreme weather changes around the world. A rise above 1.5°C would have devastating consequences for people and wildlife. Poorer and disadvantaged people in the UK are particularly vulnerable. Current global greenhouse gas emission trajectories put us on track for around a 3°C increase by 2100. Yet we still have time to stay within safe limits – if we step up action now. We must change the way we use and generate energy, change our diets and share the Earth's limited resources more fairly. We must also be ready to withstand some of the impacts of climate change.

Facts about global warming greenhouse gases

1. Just 2°C of global warming could drive 20-30% of plants and animals to extinction and reduce the amount of food we can get from crops by as much as 2% per decade.
2. Each degree of global warming will lead to more extreme weather, including flash floods and heat waves. In the UK, 4 million people may be at significant risk of flooding by 2050, double the current number.
3. Global emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases need to be halved by 2030 and reach zero around 2050. To make the UK's contribution to greenhouse gas reduction fair, we need to cut our emissions by 75-90% by 2030 and reach net zero before 2045.
4. Doubling the size of the UK's forests and restoring peatlands and wetlands can take some carbon dioxide out of the air. This will help offset emissions in sectors where achieving zero emissions is very hard (e.g. agriculture) but the quantity drawn down is limited and can't be used as an excuse to continue burning fossil fuels.
5. Transport and heating are now the UK's biggest problem areas for greenhouse gases.

The problems

The [Earth's temperature is increasing](#) faster than is natural. This is largely the result of our burning of coal, oil and gas - fossil fuels - but also from deforestation. So far, we've seen a more than 1°C increase since the Industrial Revolution – enough to cause extreme weather across the world and harm people and wildlife.

Any increase over 1.5° will have disastrous consequences worldwide. Based on how we live now, around 3° of global warming is likely by the end of the century — unless we step up action immediately.

It is the poorest and most vulnerable people who will suffer most. Women, children and the elderly are particularly at risk. Africa will be most affected, even if we help African nations adapt.

However, most countries including the UK are not doing anything like enough to cut emissions fast. The UK government has set targets but its own advisors, the Climate Change Committee, has said there is a massive gap between rhetoric and action.

Things we can do to reduce greenhouse gases

The change needed is vast, but it is achievable and will lead to many other benefits, like less air pollution and more jobs. Taking action now is also cheaper – the later we leave it, the more it will cost.

We need to:

Keep fossil fuels in the ground. We need to leave at least 80% of our coal, oil and gas deposits alone if we want to prevent warming above 1.5 degrees. The UK should stop all new licences for fossil fuel extraction including in the North Sea.

Switch to electric vehicles fast. Electric cars are much cleaner and over their lifetime comparable or even cheaper in cost than petrol or diesel cars. Following campaigns by Friends of the Earth and others, the UK government has set a date of 2030 by which all new cars should be low carbon.

Be energy-efficient citizens. We need to reduce global energy use by around 50%. The government should provide householders with grants to fit insulation and low carbon electric eco-heating. A local authority area-by-area programme would be the most efficient and cost effective way of doing this. A Fair Heat Deal which promises to ensure that fitting eco-heating is no greater than replacing a gas boiler is needed.

Use renewables to power the world. The UK is leading the way in off-shore wind but only a third of our electricity comes from wind and solar. And we'll need much more electricity to power transport and heating as electric vehicles and eco-heating take-up increases. In the UK we should be building 14GW of renewable energy every year - equal to installing around 10 wind turbines every day.

Change our diets. Meat production results in extremely high greenhouse gas emissions and is a major driver of deforestation and the destruction of nature. In the UK we need to halve the amount of meat we eat by 2030 to help reduce greenhouse emissions. Less but better meat production globally would allow a significant increase in the amount of forests. This would be a boon for biodiversity – and forests also take carbon out of the air.

Double the area of forests and restore habitats in the UK. Trees suck carbon dioxide out of the air. In the UK we don't have enough of them. Doubling the area of forests in the UK and restoring peatlands and wetlands, such as saltmarsh, would help address climate change and support nature.

Stop funding fossil fuels overseas. The UK and other wealthy countries have a long-track record of funding fossil fuels abroad. The G7 announced in 2021 that it would stop funding coal-plants but not that it would stop funding gas. Wealthy governments need to switch all their energy funding to renewable energy. In addition they need to compensate poorer countries for the damage caused by climate change (so-called Loss and Damage) and provide the climate finance promised.

Empower women. Gender equality, secondary education for all girls, and sexual and reproductive rights for women are fundamental human rights; absent in too many parts of the world. They are necessary so that women can fully contribute to [tackling climate change](#) and adapting to it, including in politics, policy and lifestyle choices.

Create an equal world. The 1 billion wealthiest people in the world consume most of the world's resources. If we are to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all 8 billion people on our planet, we need to share our resources more fairly.

All these changes will lead to a better world. But they will only happen if people everywhere put more pressure on politicians, businesses and investors. We must also curtail the influence of the fossil fuel industry and others lobbying against action.