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Guest column: 5 things you can do to combat climate change

By Ann-Gayl Ellis, guest columnist
In print: Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Editor's note: This is National Public Health Week. This year's theme is "Climate Change: Our Health In Balance." The following information was adapted from information provided by the American Public Health Association.

Quick: What comes to mind when you think about climate change? If your thoughts turn to polar bears and melting ice caps, you're not alone. Americans are concerned about climate change. We know it is real and we think it is scary, but we tend to think about it in terms that are far removed from our everyday lives.

In fact, climate change has a direct connection to all of us, in the most personal way. It has and will have real consequences for the health of our communities, our families and our children.

The problem with focusing on climate change in terms of a doomsday scenario is that it can paralyze us and cause inaction. According to a recent Center for Excellence in Climate Change Communication Research poll, less than half of Americans believe they are personally at risk from global warming, but significantly more believe it is a threat to future generations (60 percent) or to all life (57 percent).

Even those who think of climate change on a here-and-now basis may not know just how serious the danger really is. The World Health Organization reports that human-induced changes in the Earth's climate now lead to at least 5-million cases of illness and more than 150,000 deaths each year.

In recent years, the scientific community has started to understand more about the negative impact climate change has on our health and on an already strained public health system. The laundry list of health issues that are growing more problematic as a result of increased climate variability is long: heatstroke and hypothermia, asthma, cardiovascular and pulmonary illness, gastrointestinal illnesses associated with water contamination, and the list goes on.

Furthermore, the most vulnerable members of our population — those who depend on the public health system for their care, including the poor, the chronically ill, the elderly, the disabled and the uninsured — are most affected by the health impacts of climate change, giving this struggle moral dimensions, as well.

Here are five ways you can take action in your life today.

- Inform yourself about the health impacts of climate change and regional climate change issues facing your community and take actions to prepare for possible disasters.

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- Leave the car at home one day and take public transportation instead. Walk or bike. If you need to drive, carpool. If you can, telecommute.
- Buy food from a community farmer's market that doesn't travel across the country to get to your supermarket shelves. Eat more vegetables and less meat.
- Green your work. Use recycled paper if you don't already, and even if you do, print less often and on both sides of the paper. Set your computer to energy-saver mode and buy eco-friendly office furniture.
- Green your home. Insulate your home so that energy isn't literally going out the window. Reduce your use of wasteful products, reuse or recycle the products you do use, and conserve water.

Taken together, these five changes can chart a path toward a healthier personal lifestyle, community and climate.

Ann-Gayl Ellis is health education program manager at the Hernando County Health Department.

[Last modified: Apr 10, 2008 04:21 PM]

Comments on this article

by Bill **Apr 10, 2008 4:21 PM**

My bike is a blast and keeps me fit: steak and greens from my farmer's market on the grill is awesome: doubling my prints and insulating my house saves me extra cash for the game. No sky falling here, Jim. Have fun in your rhetorical

by Dr **Apr 10, 2008 4:18 PM**

Over 400 World Wide Prominent Scientists Disputed Man-Made Global Warming Claims in 2007. See <http://tinyurl.com/2dv6nz>

by tom **Apr 8, 2008 4:07 PM**

According to a recent Center for Excellence in Climate Change Communication Research poll... Google this and you come up with... Exec Dir Edward Maibach currently enjoys serving as one of Al Gore's "1,000 Voices" for The Climate Projec

by TOM **Apr 8, 2008 1:23 PM**

CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HOAX. HOW COME IN THE ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL WARMING THE SUN IS ALMOST NEVER REFERENCED. LAST YEAR TEMPS (COLDER) WIPED OUT ENTIRE YEAR OF WARMING. STOP SCARING PEOPLE SO YOU CAN INJECT YOUR LIBERAL POLICIES AND RAISE TAXE

by jim **Apr 8, 2008 11:12 AM**

don't forget to live in a tent. bathe no more often than weekly. dig a latrine. if you subscribe to this newspaper, forego toilet paper. substitute roadkill for hamburgers. send your car to china. always carry an umbrella in case the sky falls.

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