

# U.N. warns of a coming climate catastrophe

## What happened

Climate change could cause devastating food shortages and wildfires, submerged coastlines, and a mass die-off of coral reefs within two decades, unless humanity drastically cuts its fossil fuel use, a major United Nations scientific report warned this week. Authored by 91 scientists from 40 countries who analyzed more than 6,000 scientific studies over three years, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report says that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at current levels, the planet could warm by 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit over pre-industrial levels by 2040. At that level of warming, summer heat waves will get hotter and longer, intense droughts more common, and extreme rainfall events such as hurricanes Harvey and Florence more frequent. If warming hits 3.6 degrees, twice as many crops in the tropics will perish as in a 2.7-degree-hotter world, the number of people affected by water scarcity will double, and the size of global fisheries will drop by 50 percent.



Coal plants will have to close to cool the planet.

To prevent 2.7 degrees of warming, the reports says, greenhouse gas emissions will have to decrease 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, and be entirely eliminated by 2050. The amount of electricity derived from coal will have to fall from nearly 40 percent today to as low as 1 percent by 2050. At the same time, renewable energy sources such as wind and solar—which currently account for 20 percent of energy generated—will have to rise to 67 percent. The report is “like a deafening, piercing smoke alarm going off in the kitchen,” said Erik Solheim, executive director of the U.N. Environment Program. “We have to put out the fire.”

## What the editorials said

“We’re cooked—and a lot faster than we thought,” said *The New York Times*. The cost of our continued coal and oil habit “will be measured in trillions of dollars and in sweeping societal and environmental damage,” including mass migrations as people flee flooded and scorched lands. Yet our president says he’s smitten with “clean beautiful coal” and has reversed Obama-era policies intended to slash coal plant emissions. “This is unbelievably reckless.”

World leaders need to be more ambitious, said *Bloomberg.com*. The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, which President Trump foolishly

quit last year, asks governments to keep global average temperatures from rising more than 3.6 degrees. But we now know that level of warming is too much. To keep warming below 2.7 degrees, governments must “tax carbon emissions at a rate sufficient to discourage use of fossil fuels and raise demand for renewables.” The longer such a levy is put off, “the harder it will be to limit the damage.”

## What the columnists said

Many climate activists “oppose doom-and-gloom rhetoric,” said *Emily Atkin* in *TheNewRepublic.com*. They believe that if people lack hope, “there will never be action.” Yet with Trump dismantling U.S. climate policy, and the U.N. giving us no reason to be optimistic about humanity’s survival, that logic “feels increasingly deluded in practice.” But hope is not the same as courage. “Pessimism just might convince enough people about the urgency of climate change, and encourage them to find the resolve to join the fight.”

“Contrary to common rhetoric,” said *William Murray* in *WashingtonExaminer.com*, most conservatives “agree humans are making the planet warmer.” What we don’t accept are the “transparent wealth-redistribution schemes,” such as carbon taxes, which the Left claims are “the only solution to climate change.” What’s truly needed is private and public investment in “adaptation and resiliency projects” like sea walls, dikes, and raised roadways—as well as “post-carbon technologies.” Collaboration and trust between conservatives and environmentalists is possible, and it would benefit us all.

“If the human species specializes in one thing,” said *Auden Schendler* and *Andrew Jones* in *The New York Times*, “it’s taking on the impossible.” The challenges are immense. We need to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 6 to 9 percent—“every year, in every country, for half a century.” We’ll have to leave coal, oil, and natural gas in the ground, depriving companies and countries of vast amounts of wealth. Solving climate change will be “harder, and more improbable, than winning World War II.” But if history is any guide, “we know what happens when enough people take up a cause as practice: Cultural norms change.” Saving civilization is worth the effort.

## It wasn’t all bad

■ When Army medic Luis Ocampo came home after days away helping with the Hurricane Florence relief effort, he found his own scene of devastation. Looters had stolen \$5,000 worth of property from his house in Charlotte, N.C. A friend launched an online fundraiser to replace the lost goods, reaching \$15,000 in 11 days. But Ocampo and his girlfriend aren’t keeping that extra \$10,000—they’re giving it away to worthy causes, including the Soldiers and Airmen Assistance Fund. “I wanted to pay that back,” Ocampo said, “to someone else who needed help.”

■ Canadian neurosurgeon Daniel McNeely has performed surgery on many human patients, and now he’s done the same for a much-loved teddy bear. When 8-year-old Jackson McKie—who suffers from hydrocephalus—was wheeled into the operating room, he brought his furry friend, Little Baby, with him. Before being put under, Jackson asked McNeely



Stitching up Little Baby

if he could fix a tear under the bear’s arm. “How could I say no?” McNeely said. So after repairing a shunt in Jackson’s brain, he stitched up Little Baby, making sure to give him “oxygen” and monitor his vitals. Jackson is now on the mend, says his dad, Rick. And Little Baby? “He’s coming around. According to Jackson, he’s a little moody, too.”

■ For the first five years of his life, Mason Motz could barely pronounce a word. His parents attributed his condition to his diagnosis with Sotos syndrome—which can cause learning disabilities—and put him in speech therapy, with little result. The Texas boy’s life changed during a visit to a dentist. While Dr. Amy Luedemann-Lazar was working on some cavities, she noticed the band of tissue under Mason’s tongue was shorter than normal, leaving him tongue-tied. She performed a 10-second surgery, and within hours Mason was talking with clear words. Mason’s mom, Meredith, was astounded. “It’s like, ‘Oh my goodness, who are you?’”