a4ch.org
ASSOCIATION FOR CLIMATE HEALTH
Sharing ideas and information to fight climate change

Journal of the Association for Climate Health

Spring 2020

Letter from the Managing Director

First, we want to welcome our new members to the Association! We hope you have been enjoying our website and our postings on LinkedIn and Facebook. We look forward to you sharing your own findings, ideas and contributions over the years to come.

These are indeed interesting times. Through the fall of 2019 and early 2020, it seemed that the climate crisis finally made it to the table. Most presidential candidates were proposing substantial programs to reduce greenhouse gases; international banks and hedge funds were refusing to fund new fossil fuel projects. Retailers like IKEA were redesigning entire product line to reduce their carbon footprint. But a tiny microscopic organism may have forced all that momentum to a standstill.

We must not let that happen. Even as people fear for their lives in the short run, even as stores and restaurants close around us and the streets look emptier than in known memory, we still need clean air to breathe. We need temperatures mild enough to grow the food we eat; we need forests to thrive and replenish the oxygen we breathe. We prefer the glaciers continue in the high mountains which melt every spring and provide drinking water for millions in the towns and cities below. We want a world with icebergs for the penguins and polar bears, knowing a world that can support icebergs is a world where the seas have not risen to overflow our beaches and the coastal cities with them. And for that, we need to restore the health of our climates around the world.

Yes, there are fewer greenhouse gases now, with factories shutting down and fewer cars on the road. But those gains are temporary, and we need more, much more. More positive action from individuals, corporations and governments to turn this climate situation around. More positive action from schools and retailers and universities so that the world we leave our children is a world which offers beauty and peace, safety and security, a world we will not be ashamed to leave them.

Looking through the window as I write this, it is a gloomy day outside. And yet there are red and yellow tulips blooming, from bulbs I brought back after a trip to Holland last year. Tulips are a vibrant spring flower which, planted well, return year after year, renewing themselves. They are a reminder that even when the outlook is dreary, the works of your own hands can bring light and hope, growth and joy. That the work you do can bring benefits for years to come. That is what I hope for the work of the ACH and for all of you – let it be like those tulips, making the world a little better, for many years to come.

Enjoy the rest of this, our first issue of the *Journal of the Association for Climate Health*.

Best regards,
Nancy Boxer
Managing Director, Association for Climate Health

What we have accomplished in the past 4 months

Over the past several months ACH went from idea to incorporation. We applied and were approved for the 501c3 status which allows us to call ourselves a nonprofit and receive tax-deductible contributions from individuals as a charity.

We established a website www.a4ch.org and filled it with dozens of good ideas to mitigate the climate crisis. We created 12 categories of climate-related areas of interest, including agriculture, industry, utility companies, individual actions, racial justice, legal, technology and local communities, and each of these links a variety of articles or strategies for change. Our **Ideas Forum** is searchable, so you can enter a word like "cows" or "zoning" and find something interesting to read. You can browse the page as is to find the most recent items or click on a category and see articles related to your areas of interest.

Some of our members asked what **books** they could read, to get up to speed, so we created a page of Book Resources, with links to purchase the books if you want to do so. This page includes fiction and children's books, and if you scroll down further, some miscellaneous resources for fun – a documentary, a climate-related video game, and so on.

Teachers and principals said they'd like links to **resources for the schools**, so we created a page with lesson plans, background information, games and prompts for students of all grade levels.

Some asked for a page of **resources for communities**, so we created one with links including sites to track and reduce energy use in buildings, trainings for public officials, information on fast-tracking solar energy projects, how to design and get approval for sustainable climate and energy plans, plus toolkits for local churches, hospitals and towns who want to lead their people toward greener lifestyles.

Other members said they need resources for work, so we created a page of **sustainability resources for business**, including links on greener product design, reducing energy use, trainings for green maintenance and supply chain, accounting and disclosure requirements, in addition to networking groups so people in similar situations can find support and share what works for them.

We feel quite proud of this creation – a sturdy base of offerings, ideas and strategies for people and organizations throughout most of the economy.

More focus on helping smaller communities move into action

A number of experts suggested that one of the biggest gaps between good intentions and actual accomplishment of climate mitigation is at the local level. Large cities have many climate resources to turn to – websites and organizations, grants and tax revenues, and paid staff to devote to climate programs. But in the smaller cities, towns and rural areas, there may be awareness but less education, funding or expertise, and so they lag behind. Although the world is increasingly urban, only 20% of the US population live in the top 100 cities, similarly in many other countries. So, providing climate-related help for the areas where the other 80% live could be a vital step.

Thus ACH has begun offering help to these smaller communities – cities, suburbs, towns. Our first effort was to understand their situation – what climate mitigation work is being done in these locations, what allies they have, what risks and roadblocks they face. We found a good vehicle for this in the 150 Environmental Advisory Councils which report to mayors and town councils across the state of Pennsylvania. With the cooperation of the EAC Network, we surveyed these groups and wrote up our findings *in Insights Into Community Climate Work* which you can find on our website at https://www.a4ch.org/insights-into-community-climate-work.

Some of the findings are quite interesting. Most respondents reported finding more support for climate mitigation work than in the past. But progress continues to be hampered by climate deniers, apathy and competing priorities, even as the majority of the country agrees that climate change has already impacted them, and that governments should do more to reduce climate change. The more successful small community climate advocates spend time creating allies, which can further their climate agenda more effectively than data, reports and presentations. We are sharing these results so that local activists do not feel alone, and we are pointing them to trainings on how to create allies and influence policy.

As a follow-up, the EACs asked for assistance on a variety of related topics – energy planning, encouraging local businesses to be climate leaders, negotiating for renewable energy. We will update you as these projects develop.

Enjoy some of our top Idea Forum posts from the past several months:

Agriculture:

Yes, cows create a lot of methane, but adapting natural herd movements can also capture carbon in the soil. Cattlemen in the US and South Africa are experimenting with herding cattle to intensively graze small pastures, fertilize (manure) as they go, and then herd them onto new patches. *CNN*'s David McKensie and Brent Swails suggest that rotating these pastures with unplowed cropland will help restore carbon into the soil, resulting in better crop yields, higher market prices for the grass-fed meat, and a better carbon footprint for the planet. https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/06/africa/agriculture-regenerative-farming-climate-crisis-intl/index.html

Climate Justice:

Hip-hop sustainability – use language that appeals to diverse audiences!

Thomas Easley of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies advocates for using hip hop to reach young people and diverse communities on why green issues are important to their lives. Community health issues, climate justice and having a voice can all be part of an approach which bridges a gap to underrepresented communities, activating them to participate more in the fight for the planet. https://www.greenbiz.com/article/hip-hop-can-bring-green-issues-communities-color

Climate Research:

Can small plants with more surface area do even more than trees to pull carbon out of the atmosphere?

Two European companies are working on augmented-nature solutions to climate change. Arborea UK designs rooftop installations of microplants and algae which filter the air and produce nutrients which can be harvested as food. Green City Solutions, a German company, has developed what they call City Trees, each a sculptural, blocky form filled in with mosses which pull CO2, NOx and particulates out of the air and turn them into nutrients. Both these companies estimate their technology can perform the

filtration of many trees in a space significantly smaller than would be needed by trees themselves.

Climate Strategy:

4 social investment strategies to reboot the post-COVID economy which also create a healthier climate

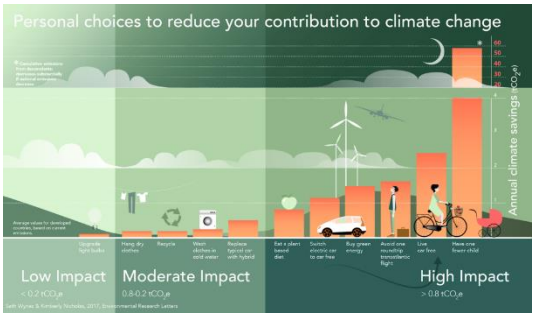
Fast Company's Kristin Toussant proposes four major infrastructure programs that governments can pursue, creating win/win solutions for jobs, economic growth and a more sustainable future: retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency, updating the electric transmission grid, investing in public transit with zero emissions, and planting trees.

Creating Behavior Change:

Making activism more effective

Climate strikes may help activists feel they are doing a good thing, but how much do they accomplish really? Writers and professors Nives Dolsak and Aseem Prakash argue that, beyond building a sense of solidarity among supporters, many climate strikes accomplish little or nothing. Strikes in blue states where a majority of citizens already support climate issues may do little, though strikes in purple or red states may create more publicity or pressure for a healthier climate. Strikes which hamper work or shoppers going into stores may produce pressure on the business to support a change in policies. Strikes at universities may be effective if aimed to change university investment policies or other specific actions where the school has some leverage to make a difference. Those who instigate or lead strikes may want to target specific goals and create their social protests accordingly.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/prakashdolsak/2019/09/14/climate-strikes-what-they-accomplish-and-how-they-could-have-more-impact/#691a68875eed

Individuals:



The best actions people can take to reduce their climate impact

Former high school teacher turned professor Seth Wynes and his colleague Kimberly Nicholas found that few high school textbooks cover the most important lifestyle choices people can change to reduce their carbon footprint, though many less-effective steps are frequently mentioned. The top lifestyle choices in developed countries that contribute to global warming, and which can be modified through personal choice, include the number of children you have (the single most significant contributor is each additional human on the planet), living with a car (public transportation, biking or walking are greener choices), travelling by airplane (remember Greta Thunberg's choice of sailboat instead of airplane?) and eating a plant-based diet (eating beef, lamb and milk products are all high impact foods). Their report can be found here; above is their now-famous chart, thanks to Connecticut Public Radio.

Industry:

Video gaming adds substantially to worldwide greenhouse gas emissions but most of the industry is in denial

Currently in its 9th generation stage of development, the gaming industry features games which use as much as 70 times more energy than the early games of the 1970s, and may account for 2-3% of all residential power consumption. A very few manufacturers, notably Nintendo whose Switch console uses less power than most competitors, are paying attention. Game developers can also help by creating games which draw less power, yet only a few developers have admitted any concern. Yet. Perhaps consumers – and the friends and family members who give games to gamers – need to begin voting with their dollars. Why not; it's worked in many other industries – autos, HVAC systems, home appliances … https://www.cnet.com/features/xbox-ps5-and-the-climate-crisis-next-gen-video-games-could-be-worse-for-the-planet/#ftag=CAD-09-10aai5b

Investors:

Investment Community Responds to the Climate Crisis' Effect on Oil and Gas Companies

When the Spanish energy company Repsol wrote $5 billion off their books in December 2019, the *Wall Street Journal* called it "the first [such move] by a major oil and gas player acknowledging a lower value of its assets [which] was linked to a long-term view that a transition to less carbon-intensive energy will make oil and gas less valuable." As investors increasingly fear market and governmental forces will lower demand for fossil fuels or increase the regulation of their use, these risks will be reflected on corporate balance sheets, and in prices per share.

Chevron also took a $10 billion write-down in December, mostly on the value of their gas holdings, which they explained was due to lower commodity prices, though many believe the true cause of lower prices is increasing competition from renewable energy sources.

Goldman Sachs announced that it will no longer finance new oil drilling or exploration projects in the Arctic, nor any additional coal mining projects worldwide. Goldman Sachs' new ban on fossil fuel projects may have been influenced by a coalition of environmental groups lobbying banks to stop enabling climate-negative projects, but major shifts in public opinion and government policy are also becoming powerful forces for change. Blackrock, which runs many funds, also announced it will be steering investors away from higher-carbon investments.

For more on corporate and financial institutional responses to global warming, read https://www.greenbiz.com/article/shift-low-carbon-economy-highlights-overlap-between-esg-and-finance

Legal:

Lawsuits Will Increasingly Make Business More Climate Aware

Using lawsuits to pressure business to soften their impacts on climate is the thrust of a new area of environmental law.

- Lawsuits in Holland and Pakistan have successfully argued that governments can be held liable for not carrying through with their climate change obligations.
- A German court has (for the moment) agreed that a corporation may be partially liable for climate damage due to its actions.
- Recent U.S. cases against oil and gas companies have not validated this approach yet, though one New York case resulted in a settlement favoring investors who claimed they

were inadequately warned by Peabody Energy's corporate climate disclosures. Another New York case against ExxonMobil did not reward a similar lawsuit. Yet often the pioneering edge of the law meets many setbacks until the occasional win begins to set enough precedent to make a difference in how companies act.

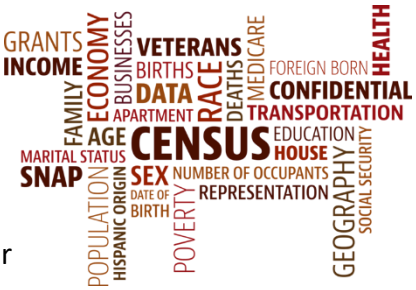
Litigation to hold business responsible for damage to climate health will continue into the future. We predict such tactics will meet with substantial success as new precedents are considered and adopted. Remember Erin Brockovich? The law is an ever-evolving instrument for change. Article courtesy of *Green Biz*: https://www.greenbiz.com/article/will-private-sector-be-held-liable-climate-change

Science and Technology:

Air + Water Vapor + Nanowires produced by microbes = new sustainable power source

Work done at University of Massachusetts Amherst may soon lead to genetically engineered microbes manufacturing protein-based conductive "wires" which can create electricity out of humidity in the air. By stringing multiple units together, this promises to power small devices with zero waste products and a cleaner carbon footprint.

State and local:



Encourage census participation for climate health and climate justice!

Grist's Emily Pontecorvo reports on how getting complete and accurate census data can help with climate initiatives and a fairer society. Companies seeking emissions permits, and projects requiring environmental impact statements for new facilities all use census data. If a population is under-reported, the reports will falsely reflect under-reported estimates of social costs. Government grants are often allocated based on population and poverty estimates provided by the US Census, so under-counting also reduces funding for schools, health care and most other social spending. Let's make sure every neighbor counts!

https://grist.org/climate/the-2020-census-can-help-us-fight-climate-change-if-coronavirus-doesnt-get-in-the-

way/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=weekly&utm_content=[[post.post_title]]?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=weekly

Utility Companies:

States and utility companies working together to help climate change

Greenbiz writer Rachel Gold reports that 13 states now feature performance incentives to encourage energy savings at high-load times of day, thus optimizing the power grid, reducing emissions and allowing more use of renewable energy sources. Historically utilities have earned more money when they increase capital expenditures, including building more capacity for peak loads. But peak load capacity is often less efficient, more polluting and/or less reliable. So shaving demand for power at peak times can be a way forward into a more sustainable future. Performance-based rate structures, in use by 19 states, are another tool to help by reward utilities for achieving efficiency measures. Give utility companies incentives to reduce their carbon footprint - that's a great strategy for improving climate health!