Southern Oregon Climate Action Now
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Confronting Climate Change
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Spotlight

When Climate Change Comes to Town

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By Lorrie Kaplan, Chair, Ashland Climate Action Project

CLIMATE CHANGE FEELS PRETTY REAL IN SOUTHERN OREGON LATELY. Most of us just experienced the hottest temperatures of our lifetimes. Our gardens are scorched. TID is done for 2021. Our to-go bags are packed and ready.

The scientific consensus is that we need to act with urgency. And yet, clearly, we're not all on the same page. Facing climate change is no longer primarily a scientific or technological challenge. In fact, the science is clear and we already have most of the technologies needed to reduce our emissions. Where we fall down is where, when, and how we talk about what we need to do. We need pointers!

And so it was inspiring to hear climate research scientist Dr. Jennifer Marlon from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication speaking at the June monthly meeting of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now. Marlon and her colleagues use surveys, experiments, and modeling to understand public perceptions of and responses to climate change and extreme weather events. Her recent projects include the Yale Climate Opinion Maps --these are amazing! Here's a link to her presentation (https://bit.ly/SOCANClimateCommunications).

For those trying to push for climate solutions, research coming out of Yale and other climate research centers is illuminating.

First, they've boiled climate change facts down to a few simple concepts that have achieved a 97% consensus in the scientific community. These are: climate change is real. It's caused by burning fossil fuels. The effects are mostly bad. And it's going to get worse if we don't do more about it quickly.

Thankfully, there's also strong consensus that there is reason for hope.

"We have so many technologies in our toolkit," according to Marlon. "We need to innovate in terms of policy and cultural and social change. But we have lots of evidence from history that those things can change quite quickly--more quickly than it feels. We don't actually need everyone to agree in order to enact policy or make important behavior changes." Yale and George Mason University have closely studied the climate change opinions of Americans' of all political persuasions for more than a decade. These studies suggest that only 8% of Americans are climate deniers while 72% of Americans believe it's real. In Jackson County, Marlon reports, about 10% of residents are dismissive while 50% are alarmed or concerned,

After that, popular opinion starts to slide. Ninety-seven percent of scientists may agree that climate change is largely human-caused --"about as strong as the

consensus among medical professionals that smoking causes lung cancer" -- but only 58% of Americans believe it. Perplexing...but still a majority!

People slammed by droughts, scorching temperatures, and wildfires aren't necessarily more likely to believe that climate change is a problem that will actually affect them personally. "It depends on what's in our heads as well as what's happening outside around us," says Marlon. Most Americans see climate change as a problem that may affect future generations--but not here in the U.S.

The scientific consensus is that the problem is much closer to home.

What to do? First, start talking about it. "People don't talk about it because we don't want to promote conflict. We might feel like we don't know the science and the facts, and that stimulates what we call a spiral of silence. But that reinforces this idea that we don't care, because we talk about what we care about."

Focus on talking with--and listening to--people with whom you have a trusting relationship. The most effective conversations can be with the vast majority of people who care, but aren't activated yet. "Just because people are alarmed, doesn't mean that they know what to do or are talking about the problem and its solutions,"

Marlon urges us to "help people connect the dots between weather events and climate change and its root causes. Droughts and wildfires and heat waves can be lessened. We are already working to lessen them as we switch over to electric vehicles and install solar panels and insulate our attics and eat less meat."

Taking action is even more important. "When you yourself take action on climate change, whether that's through reducing waste or by supporting companies that have sustainable behavior, or writing an op-ed in your local paper, people see that, and it can really promote change."

"So yes, it's about talk, but it's also about action and being a role model for others so they can see what the right action looks like."

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Learn to Talk About Climate Change

YaleClimateConnections.org has tons of resources, including multi-year national, state, and county opinion data.

TED talk by evangelical climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe -- "The most important thing you can do to fight climate change is to talk about it."

The film **MerchantsOfDoubt.org** shows how fossil fuel companies used the tobacco industry's playbook to sow confusion about the impact of fossil fuels on the climate.

The website **SkepticalScience.com** categorizes the types of arguments used by climate skeptics. Also comes as an app for your phone.

The game **CrankyUncle.com** builds resilience against misinformation.