



Version 1.0, Feb 2008

Climate Change and Your Office – Frequently Asked Questions and Myth Busting

The UK and the EU are developing ambitious targets to cut CO₂ emissions by 60% or even 80% by 2050 (and some scientists are calling for faster cuts). To meet these targets every community will need to play its' part and there is also a need to keep up the political pressure. Your organisation can play its' part by:

- Making your own savings
- Lobbying your MP
- Using your networks to get more people aware and active
- Joining the 'Stop Climate Chaos' coalition: www.stopclimatechaos.org.
- Sign the Voluntary and Community Sector declaration on climate change: www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/declaration.

Tackling the myths

There's still some people around who don't want to believe it's happening and will use a range of half-truths to argue for doing nothing. For anyone wanting to tackle these issues, New Scientist magazine has an excellent guide which also tackles common 'climate change myths': <http://environment.newscientist.com/channel/earth/climate-change>

Why worry about Climate Change?

Almost all serious scientists now agree that the world is warming and that this is at least partly the result of human activities. Global temperature rose by 0.7°C during the 20th century. All but one of the warmest 10 years on record has occurred since 1990 (*all figures from UK government*.) and all the signs are that it will get worse.

Concern about climate change is all over the press and TV but many people still have questions:

- Is it really happening?
- Why is it happening?
- How will it affect me and my family?
- Can we do anything about it?

Is it really happening?

Almost all serious scientists now agree that the world is warming and that this is at least partly the result of human activities. Global temperature rose by 0.7°C during the 20th century. All but one of the warmest 10 years on record has occurred since 1990 (*all figures from UK government.*) and all the signs are that it will get worse.

Why is it happening?

One key reason is that we are putting more gases into the atmosphere that absorb more of the sun's heat. These gases include Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) and Methane. CO₂ is responsible for about 2/3 of all the warming resulting from human activity and CO₂ levels are rising rapidly because of the rate at which we are burning 'fossil fuels' (coal, oil and gas).

It's happening because of us and what we do. On average every person in the UK produces 9.15 tonnes of CO₂ every year. That's not as bad as the USA where the figure is 19.92 tonnes and a little better than Germany (10.46 tonnes) but a long way behind Sweden (5.91 tonnes). China produces about 3 tonnes per person per year, while for many of the world's poorest nations then figure is less than 0.2 tonnes.

How will it affect me and my family?

The climate in the UK is projected to change significantly by 2100, with average annual temperatures rising by up to 5°C over the next 100 years. The specific changes we are likely to see can be summarised as:

- Higher average temperatures
- More extreme high temperatures threatening the health of vulnerable people
- Wetter winters, leading to increased flood risk
- Drier summers, with water shortages in many areas and damage to wildlife and crops
- Rising sea levels, leading to more coastal erosion and a greater risk of flooding

All this is likely to have the worst impacts on the poorest communities (here and across the world), especially those likely to be affected by flooding or in poor housing. In the worst possible cases temperatures rising world-wide would make parts of the world uninhabitable and lead to millions of deaths.

Can we do anything about it?

Saving energy is central to avoiding the worst effects of climate change. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) released by the burning of oil products, coal, and gas is responsible for about 2/3 of all the warming resulting from human activity. The UK and the EU are developing ambitious targets to cut CO₂ emissions by 60% or even 80% by 2050 (and some scientists are calling for faster cuts). To meet these targets every community will need to play its' part, even if that does seem to be a small one.

The good news is that there is time to tackle these problems, and that this can be done in ways that can also help local communities. Low energy homes will be cheaper to heat, better public transport will benefit those without cars, and national energy efficiency programmes will create new jobs.