

 **Spotlight on Climate**

What's a Person to Do?

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All year global headlines announced one climate disaster after another—drought, wildfires, flooding, and extreme weather. This year it got personal—two favorite swimming spots went dry while multiple fires blazed around Flagstaff. When the rains came, a new brown river flashed through my neighborhood, leaving tons of mud and a new normal.

On average, worldwide temperatures have already risen 1.9°F (1.1°C) since 1850. Some parts of the Southwest are up 2°F. This is actual, measured warming. By 2050 business-as-usual could mean Arizona will be 3.6 to 8.1°F warmer.

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) says that if we keep emitting CO₂ at current rates, we will reach over 2.7°F (1.5°C) of warming by 2040. This is warmer than humans have ever experienced and will further destabilize climate. Staying below 2.7°F (1.5°C) improves the odds of avoiding irreversible tipping points like loss of major ice sheets and release of stored carbon from thawing permafrost. Each fuels further warming.

But, the IPCC also says that cutting emissions in half by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050 will likely keep us below a 2.7°F (1.5°C) rise.

So, what's a person to do? Of the greenhouse gases that impact climate, carbon dioxide is the biggest player. It's released mostly by burning oil, gas, and coal. No way around it, burning less will slow the warming.

Decarbonizing a fossil fueled world is where we come in. It will take commitment to a quiver of strategic arrows aimed at global, national, regional, and local targets. Improved energy efficiency is an easy target. Reforestation and regenerative agriculture naturally pull carbon from the air to store in trees and soil. Emerging technologies will surely have a place in the mix. But replacing fossil fuels with low and ultimately no-carbon energy will be key. Electrification across the economy using reliable clean energy like solar and wind will transform transportation, buildings, and industry.

But can we make this massive transformation in time? The IPCC and economists alike say that an economy-wide driver like a price on carbon will be essential. Regulatory approaches help, but are more complex, slower, and typically impact only slices of the economy. For example, clean energy standards address only electric utilities. Mileage standards just impact transportation.

Carbon pricing is powerful. It increases the cost of fossil fuels, motivating consumers to use less and switch to lower carbon fuels. A steadily increasing price moves investors toward clean energy. It's a price correction that accounts for fossil fuel's climate impacts as it accelerates the clean energy transition.

A variety of carbon pricing strategies exist, but the most transparent assess a fee on fossil fuels based on their carbon content. The fee is paid by extraction companies, who pass the increase along to customers, reaching most sectors of the economy.

A good price starts low to avoid an initial shock and increases predictably over time to reduce emissions at the rate we need. Models show that \$15/ton CO₂ initially, raised \$10/year reduces emissions at close to the IPCC's recommended rate. Paired with a dividend paid to people, a carbon price protects our most vulnerable from rising energy costs.

Of the developed countries, only the US and Australia do not have a carbon price. China has adopted carbon pricing in some provinces and is working on a national price. Russia is too. Both are motivated by the EU's proposed carbon border adjustment that may go into effect next year.

A border adjustment evens the playing field for imports and exports. Essentially, a business importing carbon intensive products into a country with a carbon price must pay the price at the border if their home country doesn't have a similar carbon price in effect. China and Russia are working on national carbon prices to avoid paying the EU at their border. The adjustment should motivate us too, the EU is a major US trading partner.

Several carbon pricing bills are currently in Congress, and the Senate is considering a carbon price in this fall's budget reconciliation package. To put a big climate solution to work right away, urge Senators Sinema and Kelly and Congressman O'Halleran to include a fair, transparent carbon price in this year's budget reconciliation bill.

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Northern Arizona Climate Change Alliance, www.NAZCCA.org/volunteer

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