

CLIMATE CHAOS AND THE POINT OF NO RETURN

150,000 people are already dying every year directly from the effects of climate change, and many thousands more are becoming environmental refugees. Within 50 years, nearly 40% of terrestrial plants and animals are expected to be driven to extinction as their native ranges are eliminated by changing temperatures. Polar bears and other arctic inhabitants, as well as most amphibians, face almost certain extinction. Due to unprecedented CO₂ levels, ocean pH is slated to drop .5 over this century, to levels that have not existed in the oceans for many millions of years. This acidification, as well as the warming of the ocean's waters, is expected to devastate plankton populations – the very basis of the ocean's food chain.

We cannot stop climate change; it's already happening. We do, however, have a chance to avert the worst of all potential scenarios, what scientists refer to as the "tipping point," or runaway climate change. To avoid the worst consequences of climate change, scientists believe that the US needs to stabilize emissions within a decade, begin reducing them soon thereafter, and cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050. Depending on how society responds to the threat of global warming, global average temperatures could rise by between 2.5 and 14 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. Many scientists view a 3.6 degree rise in average temperatures over pre-industrial levels as a limit beyond which large-scale, catastrophic impacts of climate change would become unavoidable. Even below this threshold, there will be significant impacts of the type we are just beginning to see: damage to ecosystems and crop yields, sea level rise, and increased intensity and frequency of storms, droughts and wildfires.

Beyond an increase of 3.6 degrees, scientists predict that we'll see the eventual loss of the Greenland ice sheet, the displacement of tens of millions of people due to sea level rise, expansion of insect-borne disease, a greater risk of positive feedback loops (like methane released in melting permafrost) that will lead to greater warming, and eventually, major crop failures in many parts of the world, extreme disruption of ecosystems, and an increased potential for the shutdown of the thermohaline circulation, which carries warmth from the tropics to Europe. If Greenland melts or breaks up and slips into the sea, or if half of Greenland and half of Antarctica melts or breaks up, sea levels worldwide will rise by 18-20 feet, displacing 40 million people in Shanghai alone and putting much of south Florida under water.

A million species face extinction by 2050, and capitalism's ongoing assault on the Earth's ecosystems is threatening to destroy the very life-support systems of the planet. Allowing business as usual to tip atmospheric CO₂ levels past the point of no return is tantamount to a death sentence for countless species and people who lack the resources to relocate to more stable climates with more sustainable infrastructure in place. Some of the rich may survive such a scenario; the Earth's ecosystems and the poor will not.

For more information, see www.risingtidenorthamerica.org.

Do We Really Need Another Power Plant in Buncombe County?

Progress Energy wants to build a new 130 megawatt oil-fired “peak” power plant next to the old county landfill in Woodfin. Progress claims that this polluting plant is necessary to meet rising energy demands in the state. However, these energy needs could easily be met through conservation measures that would save consumers money and not endanger the health of our communities and the environment. With Western North Carolina’s already dismal air quality, we simply cannot afford a dirty, oil burning power plant.

- North Carolina already ranks in the top ten states for sulfur dioxide pollution and in the top 15 for nitrogen oxide, a major component of smog.
- According to EPA statistics, nearly 1,000 premature deaths occur in North Carolina every year due to power plant emissions. This new Woodfin plant would release toxic compounds such as lead, benzene, chromium and mercury, some of which are known to cause asthma and pulmonary and heart disease.
- Despite Progress Energy’s claims that this plant will be clean, it is projected to emit 247 tons of smog forming nitrogen oxide, 2.4 tons of sulfur dioxide, and 97 tons of lung damaging particulate matter each year. That would make this plant one of the largest polluters in Buncombe County – probably in the top 5.

What about Global Warming?

- According to EPA statistics, this plant would produce an average of 217,360 pounds of carbon dioxide per hour of operation!
- The global scientific consensus is that we need to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions by at least 80% by the year 2050 in order to avert the worst consequences of climate change. With efficiency measures and renewable alternatives already available, there is no excuse for building any more fossil fuel power plants.
- Given the tax breaks that exist for alternative energy, there are several proven solar and wind technologies that can meet our energy needs at a price comparable to that of fossil fuel power plants.

Get Involved!

Despite overwhelming public opposition, our County Commissioners voted to lease public property to Progress Energy for \$1 a year to build this new plant. Contact your County Commissioners and tell them this is unacceptable -- no more dirty power plants in Buncombe County! It’s not too late to stop this plant, but we all need to make our voices heard and demand that the county not sacrifice public health and clean air for Progress Energy’s short-term profit!

For more info, see www.mvalliance.net or www.risingtidenorthamerica.org. To get involved, contact newenergyparadigms@gmail.com or risingtide@mountainrebel.net.