

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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We Must Move Quickly to Prevent an Unlivable Planet

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) just released another report stating that global warming is getting much worse than expected. A target of a maximum increase in atmospheric temperature of 1.5°C. will not be achieved and even a maximum increase of 2.0°C. is unlikely even if all the countries achieve their Paris Agreement objectives. To have any chance at all to meet these goals will require greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to peak by 2025. Otherwise, the IPCC says, we are heading to an “unlivable planet”. Country governments, particularly the developed ones, corporations and individuals must all make greater efforts to minimize GHG emissions, immediately.

The two biggest polluters, China and U.S.A., must set an example and be more active in reducing GHG emissions. For China, the lead must come from the Chinese Communist Party which sets the direction of the country. While their top objective may be the building of the economy, they can still do it and reduce emissions by adopting sustainability strategies. For the U.S., the Democrat administration must take the lead and move climate change up its list of priorities. When a politician creates his or her list of objectives by priority, they must move number one further down the list – that of getting re-elected. They should move climate change near the top as it has an impact on the whole world, not just their constituents. The government should move quickly on initiatives that will start reducing total carbon emissions by 2025. Some of these are:

- Institute a carbon tax with the total amount to be returned to citizens as a dividend.
- Convince the auto industry to produce more fuel efficient gas cars as we slowly convert to electric vehicle transportation.
- Introduce more renewable energy while reducing dependence on gas or coal. Drilling for gas is a major problem because methane leaks are a side result.
- Reducing dependence on gas or coal can be achieved with a switch to more efficient heating systems like heat pumps and geothermal.

Corporations don't have to wait for the governments to take the lead and probably shouldn't wait. About 25 years ago, I would have recommended all companies to embed sustainability in their operations and seek the triple bottom line – environmental integrity, social equity and economic viability or people, planet, profit. Today the goal for every company is very similar by seeking three objectives: environment, social and governance or ESG which leads to a very sustainable company. ESG is very similar to the triple bottom line except “profit” is replaced by “governance”. The latter refers to the company's management and board of directors to institute policies to achieve environmental integrity and social equity. If they are successful, a more profitable company will result.

Companies are now moving more rapidly to achieve ESG by hiring a Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) or a similar position. This is a great way to implement programs to achieve sustainability. A better way, however, is to train all the department managers in sustainability and eventually all or most of the employees. In this manner, everyone will understand the ESG objective and will work together to achieve that goal. With more employees engaged in sustainability there are improved opportunities for new ideas to be introduced and implemented. As part of their overall program, the companies should engage all their stakeholders in sustainability. They should make sure that their suppliers, customers, employees, community, and shareholders are all in tune with this program.

In addition to government bodies and corporations working to improve the environment, individuals can also participate to make it happen. Here are some of things we can do on our own:

- Travel by foot or bicycle as much as possible or use public transportation.
- If you have to drive, use a fuel efficient gas automobile or an electric vehicle.
- Minimize food waste by not purchasing more than you will need.
- When replacing your home heating system, switch from a gas system to heat pumps.
- Install solar panels on your house or at a minimum, participate in community solar.
- Make sure all your lights are LEDs.
- Calculate your carbon footprint and identify ways to reduce it. There are many websites that can help, one of which is the Nature Conservancy.

If everyone recognizes the urgency of slowing down global warming and does something about it, we can be on our way of a livable planet for future generations.