



Physicians for Social Responsibility
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June 26, 2020

Ms. Julia Burrows
Special Assistant to Mayor Darrell Steinberg
Sacramento, CA
by e-mail: JBurrows@cityofsacramento.org

Dear Ms. Burrows,

Last November 2019, I represented the seven hundred members of the Sacramento chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) during a meeting with Mr. Dennis Rogers, Chief of Staff for Councilmember Rick Jennings requesting his support of the “Climate Change Emergency Declaration”.

We were pleased that on December 10 the Sacramento City Council approved the Declaration which includes the goal of achieving zero fossil fuel emissions by no later than 2030.

We are also excited by the recommendations of the Mayors’ Commission on Climate Change. PSR/Sacramento wholeheartedly support these recommendations, including electrification goals, and we urge you not to delay its implementation.

As you know, we continue at a critical tipping point and emergency measures are needed if we are to mitigate the health and environmental impacts of global warming. The future of our children and our grandchildren depends on our taking such action now.

Please distribute this letter to the commissioners. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Harry Wang, MD
President, Physicians for Social Responsibility/Sacramento

Enclosure: “Heat, Fire, Water: How Climate Change Has Created a Public Health Emergency” summary

HEAT, FIRE, WATER: How Climate Change Has Created a Public Health Emergency

Summary

Climate change affects the health of all Americans - right now. There are no exceptions. Although needed adaptation will reduce risks for all, only prompt, significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will stave off a crescendoing public health emergency. Children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions or who are socially the most vulnerable will be the most susceptible to the ravages of climate change.

HEAT: The earth is hotter now than at any time since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Records fall each year. There is no clear end to the warming that is under way. Adaptation is a needed and proven lifesaver.

- Heat illnesses were the leading cause of weather-related deaths between 1988 and 2017.
- The 1995 Chicago heat wave killed around 740 and 70,000 died in the 2003 European heat wave.
- More numerous and more severe heat waves are inevitable.
- By 2100 there will be between 2 and 3 times as many days when temperatures are over 95°F.
- Parts of the earth will become uninhabitable.
- Heat-related yields of corn and other crops may fall 80 percent by 2100. Rocketing prices, famine, food riots, civil unrest, and large refugee populations are likely. Things will be worse in El Niño years.

FIRE: Over 73,000 wildfires occur in the U.S. annually, a number that has been relatively constant for 30 years. But since 2000 about 6.9 million acres have burned annually, double the area consumed in the 1990s.

- 85 percent of wildfires are caused by human activity exacerbated by climate-related drought and pests.
- Immediate fire effects include deaths, injuries, and property damage. Paradise, California, was obliterated.
- Wildfire locations become hazardous waste sites.
- Downwind air pollution triggers asthma, worsening of COPD, acute heart attacks, and strokes, and increases long-term cancer risks. Emergency room visits and hospitalizations rise.
- West-coast fires led to increases in ozone on the East Coast that exceeded EPA standards.
- Worldwide wildfires cause over 300,000 annual deaths, a toll highest during El Niño years.

WATER: Sea levels are rising faster than expected, storms are more violent, floods and droughts affect millions, as warm moist weather fosters the spread of vectors of tropical diseases.

- Hurricane Harvey dumped 50 inches of rain on Houston, TX, Maria ravaged Puerto Rico, worse is ahead.
- High sea levels and storms combined to yield storm surges that flooded NY City during Superstorm Sandy.
- After Sandy FEMA paid \$1.4 billion 179,016 individuals and households in New Jersey and New York.
- A 0.9 m sea level rise will displace 4.2 million Americans, 13 million if oceans rises twice as much.
- Some island nations will disappear completely.

REGIONAL EFFECTS: U.S. regions will experience toxins from algal blooms, more ragweed pollen, Zika, West Nile Fever, dengue, severe thunderstorms with tornadoes, “king tides,” flooding of low-lying coastal areas, intra-state and interstate climate refugees, mud and landslides, saltwater intrusions on water supplies, the loss of water for irrigation and/or drinking as glaciers, rivers, and aquifers dry up, and much more.

1.5°C IS CRUCIAL: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change wrote that limiting global warming to 1.5°C “is projected to lower the impacts on terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems and retain more of their services to humans” including health. “Rapid and far-reaching transitions ... unprecedented in terms of scale ...” are required.

PREVENTION IS IMPERATIVE Prevention is a fundamental precept of medicine. We must mitigate climate change by curtailing greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to change by strengthening the public health infrastructure. This requires political leadership from the top down at federal, state, and local levels and bottom-up activism that demands change. Surveys indicate that this is what the public wants, but so far knowledge has not been an adequate stimulus to act. This must change. There are no alternative facts. Healthcare providers have a professional responsibility to use our medical knowledge to deal with this growing healthcare emergency. We may not get another chance.