

Oh Yes, the Climate Emergency – Alternatives North Column

Perhaps even more so than the climate crisis, the pandemic has made it clear that we are all in this together. But a comparison of our response to the two crises reveals much about human psychology and evolution. Deaths from the virus are almost 300,000 globally, and likely even 40% more with undetected causes of death. Climate change mortality from droughts, floods, storms, heat waves and other impacts is *well over this every year*, and climbing. Similarly, although the one- or two-year costs related to the pandemic are staggering, the relatively ignored costs of impacts from climate change are steep, rising rapidly, and occur *every single year*. Obviously, our responses to the two emergencies are quite different. Scientists believe we humans have evolved over time to respond quickly to emergencies we have seen before, but to lack a similar response to unfamiliar cataclysms. Given our failed climate response to date, the challenge here is clear, and consequential.

With the pandemic, global oil consumption has plummeted by about 30%, greatly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Residents and scientists are noticing abrupt improvements in air quality and even visibility in many large cities around the globe. Yet researchers expect this to be a temporary blip, and that the reductions will do little for the climate emergency. Are there ways we can retain and build on some of these benefits over the months and years of economic recovery to follow? Not surprisingly, at this moment in time there is a groundswell of interest to seize the present “opportunity” to address the profound social and environmental issues that our economy and policies have caused, including the climate emergency.

Some governments are acting accordingly. Thirteen European nations, including Germany, Spain, and Finland, have decided to build resilience and sustainability by focusing on a Green New Deal as their priority economic pathway for recovery (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidrvetter/2020/04/13/use-lessons-of-covid-19-to-build-a-green-recovery-say-eu-ministers/#8a7998143350>). Canada has decided to support oil and gas workers cleaning up abandoned oil and gas wells, and ramping up efforts to reduce harmful methane emissions from the industry (<https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2020/04/17/trudeau-announces-1-7b-in-support-for-canadas-hard-hit-energy-sector/>).

What actions will our NWT governments and industry take to address the climate crisis? Will the Government of the NWT show an emergency response as effective as that with the pandemic? Will they act to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030, as required according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change? Sadly, the ‘*NWT Strategic Framework on Climate Change*’ presents ideas that look extremely expensive, poorly coordinated, and ineffective.

In 2016, Alternatives North sponsored a report entitled ‘*100% Renewable Energy in the NWT By 2050*’ (<https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/100-renewable-energy-report-nwt-final.pdf>), showing that we already have the technical knowledge to almost eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in the North. *Last week*, Alternatives North released ‘*Climate Emergency: Getting the NWT off Diesel*’ (www.alternativenorth.com), a report addressing technical solutions at today’s cost of implementation. It lays out how the NWT can cost-effectively and quickly reduce NWT emissions by 50%, well before the 2030 deadline. Through webinars and events in Yellowknife, report authors and experienced energy experts Andrew Robinson and Lachlan Maclean and other members of Alternatives North will lead public discussions about the work. To turn this into action, we just need political will, and that’s where you and everyone else comes in. Check out the report, and consider raising your voice. As we all now know, we really are in this together!