

YES

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Where's decisive government-led action when you need it most? This year, we will emit more than 27 billion tonnes of CO₂ globally, and this rate of output is predicted to double in the next 30 years [1]. There is strong evidence to suggest that human activities are the cause of recent changes in our climate. The number of severe hurricanes has doubled in the last 30 years [2], sea levels are rising steadily [3] and glacial ice is melting progressively faster [4]. There could be 200 million 'climate refugees' as a result [5]. And reducing CO₂ emissions is a commonly-accepted objective amongst those people aware of the problem.

Until June 2008, the Government's 'Act On CO₂' website provided ten tips for reducing your personal CO₂ footprint [6]. Amongst these, are the well-known rhetorics of "do not leave appliances on standby" and "only boil as much water

“ **An energy revolution is necessary to meet these targets** ”

as you need". However, taking these actions only reduces an average household 'CO₂ footprint' by 1% and 0.2% respectively. Recently, the use of plastic bags has gained much attention in the media, which has led to some British retailers to discontinue their use. Whilst the media has succeeded in creating public concern, a household's CO₂ emissions arising from the use of plastic bags amount to a tiny 0.02% [7].

The Stern Review and the Oxford Home Truths report have both proposed that 80% reductions in Britain's CO₂ emissions are necessary by 2050 [8,9].

An energy revolution is necessary to meet these targets. As Al Gore states in his rapidly-growing 'We' climate campaign, fossil fuels are a root cause of America's three greatest problems: budget deficit, the Iraq war and climate

DEBATE: There is No Point in Making Personal Lifestyle Changes...

change [10]. In the 'We' campaign, personal choices are just one of the five proposed solutions. The other four initiatives aim to concentrate citizens' efforts into persuading leaders, who would be able to implement massive reforms. Our planet is energy-rich and our future can be energy-rich, too: reducing energy use should be only a part of the changes we make. A rapid revolution to change our energy sources away from fossil fuels whilst keeping energy consumption high will be required. Emitting carbon sparingly and reducing population growth will be inevitable as current trends are unsustainable.

Consumers don't have a choice of where or how their energy is sourced. It is naïve to expect citizens of energy-intensive countries to voluntarily give up 80% of the energy they use, whilst allowing the country to still function, without any government-led action. Some governments have already encouraged the public to make more responsible choices by subsidies or state-run projects. Germany's leadership in photovoltaic (PV) cell production is largely due to the feed-in-tariff, a form of government subsidy [11]. France's dedication to nuclear power, which provides 75% of France's energy, has brought its CO₂ emissions to one of Europe's lowest and has reduced energy prices [12]. Next year, China's state-built Three Gorges Dam will provide clean electricity for around 48 million people [13]. These success stories uncouple the link between energy use and Carbon emissions.

As individuals, we are showing concern and motivation to prevent disastrous climate change. But as individuals, any adjustments we are able to make fall far short of having strong enough effect. To avoid our current, and potentially catastrophic, trajectory, we will require decisive governmental leadership with a long-term way of thinking. ■

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...in Order to Reduce CO₂ Emissions

NO

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Government led changes are not the only way to reduce CO₂ emissions [1]. By making changes to our everyday lifestyles, we can significantly reduce our CO₂ emissions and make an appreciable difference to the environment. Greenpeace recommends halving carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 as a way to effectively limit the destructive power of global warming [1]. This would increase the chances of keeping the global rise in temperature down to 2°C, compared to a projected 5°C rise by the end of this century without action. Surely this is feasible—lessening carbon emissions by 2% per year would achieve this.

Small personal lifestyle changes can have a positive impact on CO₂ emissions, and there are a variety of lifestyle changes

investing in green energy, will bring about major reductions in our carbon footprint [4].

Heating is the biggest area in the home where it is possible to cut down on CO₂ emissions [5]—every degree dropped causes a 6% reduction in the energy used [1]. Cuts can also be achieved through using a more efficient heating system, and through increased insulation efficiency—less heat lost means less energy required to maintain temperature. This can have a huge impact—a house with cavity wall and loft insulation will lose 60% less heat than a house without [6]. All houses are now given an energy efficiency rating when they are sold, which prospective buyers can bear in mind. Further steps being taken in this direction include the design of buildings which reduce their energy needs by directly making use of warmth from the sun to heat them [4].

Thus, it can be seen that, whilst governments have the potential to create major reductions in carbon emissions, they are not the only way of doing so—personal contributions are also valid. Admittedly, you can't 'save the planet' on your own—not even if you're Brown, Bush or Bono. But we do have a chance to limit global warming by making personal lifestyle changes, if we all act together, and soon [5,7]. A radical change in public opinion could persuade many people to reduce their carbon emissions [4]. This could even see 'cruelty to the planet' being regarded as socially unacceptable in the same way that cruelty to children or animals is.

Further to the direct impact of making personal lifestyle changes, the acts also send out a message to government, and create pressure to sway them into action [1]. As with personal changes to lifestyles, real

change is most effective when the actions of many individuals combine to produce a sizeable overall effect.

By changing our lifestyles to be more environmentally friendly, especially at times when big decisions such as a new car, house or job are involved, we can make a difference to our world, and reduce the impact of global warming. ■

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that can be made. However, in order to make a substantial difference, it is important to make more changes than short-term actions such as reusing plastic bags [2]. These changes need not be huge, but can have a real impact—travelling by train rather than flying to a holiday destination will have only one tenth of the negative impact on the environment [3]. A return flight to Moscow uses up an individual's whole CO₂ budget for one year [3]. On the other hand, significant lifestyle changes, such as choosing to work from home, or

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