

What can you do about climate change?

Scientists tell us we are near the tipping point where the impacts of climate change are no longer reversible. What actions can we as individuals take, and are these actions effective?

Ashland's Conservation and Climate Outreach Commission has put together a Climate Action Card for individuals. On one side are one-time actions, such as avoiding air travel, installing solar panels on your roof, insulating windows, replacing gas appliances with electric, and buying LED light bulbs. On the other side are actions that need to be performed in daily life. These actions are things such as eating less meat, using less personal "stuff" (clothing, personal care products, groceries, or anything else you might purchase at a local store or online), using recycled or pre-owned goods when possible, driving less, and using less energy to heat homes and hot water. A good way to use this Climate Action Card is to look it over, find one or two things that would be easy for you to do, and start there. When you are comfortable with these first things, see if you can add another action or two that would still be fairly easy. If you continue you will eventually find that you have changed your lifestyle to have less impact on the environment and the climate.

There have been studies done on how effective various actions are. The effectiveness is measured in the reduction of greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, are the cause of global warming, since these gases in the atmosphere reflect heat back to earth instead of allowing it to dissipate into space. Greenhouse gases are measured in "tons of carbon dioxide equivalent," usually per year. In the United States, the average person causes emissions of 16.1 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) per year. To avoid the most drastic changes from global warming, we need to reduce average CO₂ emissions per person by about 2 tCO₂e per year, as soon as possible.

A study done by Wynes & Nicholas, 2017, indicates the following savings, in tCO₂e per year, from actions meant to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Living car-free	2.4
Eating a plant-based diet	1.15
Avoiding 14 hours of air travel	1.6

Recycling	.21
Using LED light bulbs	.1
Using cold water in laundry	.2

From these numbers you can see that if you take a number of small actions, you will cause a noticeable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Take 5 to 10 small actions and one larger action, and you are almost to - or maybe even past - the goal of reduction of 2 tCO₂e.

Once you have started changing your lifestyle, KEEP GOING! The less greenhouse gases we emit, the less global warming the earth and its inhabitants will experience.