

Spring 2005

NEWS-SHEET



Alarm Bells for Climate Change

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Climate change is a far greater threat to the world than international terrorism, according to the Government Chief Scientist. Its effects may not often be obvious to our daily lives. But the scale, inexorability and long term impact, especially on the poor, point to a mounting humanitarian and environmental catastrophe.

The overwhelming world scientific consensus is that the gas emissions from our industrial, domestic and agricultural activities are causing observable global climate change. In short, burning gas, oil and coal on a huge scale is adding too much to the natural 'greenhouse effect' (which keeps the planet warm enough to be habitable), so much that we're disturbing the Earth's natural systems.

It shows up not only in meteorological measurements but increasingly in a pattern of events across the globe consistent with what scientists predict. weather extremes like the disastrous 2003 European heat-wave are more frequent. Floods and droughts, the most damaging natural events, are more intense. Average global sea levels are rising. Environmentally, this will mean major changes to land forms and ecosystems, threatening many species. Some islands may even disappear. Low-lying regions of Bangladesh, China and the Pacific exemplify the human disruption of lives and livelihoods that could make 150 million people refugees. Water shortage looms as a future cause of war. As ever, the hardest hit will be the poor, who live in more vulnerable areas and are least able to take measures to cope.

On the advice of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, the UK Government's stated intent is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 60% less by 2050 - a huge task. Our present Kyoto targets are barely a tenth of this. To replace fossil fuels for heating, transport and making electricity needs radical ideas. To switch to renewable energy sources and energy saving is common sense but the solutions also raise practical and ethical issues which the SRT Project is examining.

For example, wind farms can meet a lot (but not all) of the need, but they are only welcome when properly planned in harmony with local authorities and communities. Much opposition has been sparked by unwise locations or insensitive developers. We have relatively low greenhouse emissions in Scotland because of nuclear and hydro-electricity. Both nuclear stations must close by 2020. To replace them by wind might require 200-300 new wind farms. Is that possible or acceptable? For the time being, we probably cannot bring in enough renewable energy to replace both fossil fuels and nuclear. So which is the priority to address?

The most sensible option is simply to reduce our demand for energy. The churches are behind a scheme called 'Contraction and Convergence'. We emit several times our planetary share of carbon dioxide, compared with our size and population. The scheme says we should reduce ours and developing countries could raise theirs towards an agreed common level which would be socially just and environmentally sustainable. But this means changing all our lives in countless small decisions. To save energy you have to do something, and the pay back is not always immediate. It requires a motivation. Christians can demonstrate that to the watching world. The Easter message that Christ came to redeem the whole creation provides the theological basis. The ACTS Eco-Congregation Programme provides a practical way for churches to act environmentally, relevant to their local situation. Over sixty churches are finding that caring for God's creation can make a real difference to church, community and environment. And it's free! Why not join us?

I told the Chief Scientist the churches were right behind the UK's emphasis on climate change. But as it hosts the G8 summit and takes on the EU Presidency, we're also watching to see consistent action. At 13.45 on Thursday 7 July, we're asking churches to ring the bells to sound the alarm for the world's richest leaders that climate change requires major changes, not just words.

For more information contact

the SRT Project at www.srtp.org.uk <<http://www.srtp.org.uk/>> or 0131-556 2953

- Eco-Congregation at www.ecocongregation.org/scotland - Climate alarm at www.climatealarm.org