

A Conversation with a Climate Scientist

ACTIVITY: Draw a line connecting students' comments on the right with a paragraph on the left. Answers may vary.

What can we expect from climate change?

Matt Barlow: It will get warmer. In 70 years, with no change in the continual increase in *carbon dioxide* levels (see p. 7), New England will likely have a climate like South Carolina's. If we cut back a lot, the climate will be more like Maryland or New Jersey. The cost of energy will increase. As it gets hotter, there will be more pollution. People will suffer from asthma. Warmer temperatures mean more water in the atmosphere, which leads to stronger storms.

Why do some sources say global warming is not a big threat? How do we know what to believe?

MB: Follow the money. If someone is telling you something, ask yourself, "What do they have to gain by it?" A lot of money is made by people in the energy business. Think about what the tobacco companies did when the public started raising questions. They took some of their own profits and funded their own institutes and paid their own scientists. My advice is to be skeptical.

Why are we doing so little? The U.S. has not signed international agreements to reduce carbon emissions. Why?

MB: The short answer is: some people make money by polluting.

What's the government doing to help us?

MB: The federal government has been slow to respond to the climate situation, but state and even town governments have taken some actions, especially for energy conservation.

How can global warming help us economically?

MB: If we act quickly to come up with new technologies, some people could benefit from the new jobs that will be created (see p. 32).

What can we do?

MB: Reduce our *carbon footprint* (see p. 28), which mainly means reducing the *petroleum-based* products we use. Drive less. Drive a more efficient car. Vote for candidates who want to reverse the warming trend through new laws and policies. If the whole country got active, we could cut back 20-30% of our energy usage.

I'm surprised that the U.S. has not signed a treaty with the rest of the world.
(Regina)

We should avoid using air conditioners in windows because they use more energy.
(Lisa)

Use small cars to save more gas. Drive a hybrid car.
(Angela)

People make a lot of money polluting. (Kemajou)

We all should be concerned. Pollution can cause trouble for all of us in the future.
(anonymous)

The government should spend more money on this issue and less money on war!
(Johnny)

The most important thing to know about climate change is that people will die.
(Sunhaing)

I'm surprised that Massachusetts could be as hot as South Carolina (Sandra).

Matt Barlow is a professor of Meteorology at UMass Lowell. He spoke with students at the Lowell Adult Education Center. This is an excerpt of their conversation, which was edited by Martha Merson. Students made the comments on the right.