

Climate Change

- An average global temperature rise of 2°C by 2100 over pre-industrial levels marks the danger threshold for irreversible and calamitous climate change. The current predicted rise is between 1.4 and 5.8°C
- The seas, expected to rise by 9 to 88cm by 2100, could engulf the Maldives, Pacific islands and parts of Bangladesh, and destroy vast quantities of freshwater supplies
- The violent weather we have seen in recent years is set to increase. It is predicted there will be 150 million environmental refugees by 2050. Long-term environmental degradation will threaten the food security and livelihoods of millions
- WHO estimates that globally, for the year 2000, there were 150,000 deaths and 5.5 million disability-adjusted life years lost due to climate change
- Global health inequalities will be exacerbated by climate change

One and a half centuries of burning ever greater quantities of fossil fuels, together with deforestation, have increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere – the main cause of global warming.

But the governments and citizens of all countries are burying their heads in the sand. The US and Australian governments haven't even signed up to the Kyoto Protocol, which contains modest targets for reductions of emissions of greenhouse gas.

The US, with 4% of the global population, is responsible for 25% of global carbon dioxide emissions. It is a bitter irony that the effects of the climate change caused overwhelmingly by the richest countries, will have a disproportionate effect upon the poorest people who have contributed least to the problem.

Citizens around the world are waking up to the ecological crisis. But action by concerned individuals will not be enough. In the long term, a complete rethink of the way we live is needed.



Droughts threaten the food security of millions in the developing world (Kittiprempool/UNEP-Still Pictures)

What needs to happen

- Cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by industrialised countries of between 60-80% by 2050
- Rich countries to make compulsory contributions to a new Climate Change Fund to enable poor countries to adapt
- Health and environmental assessments of the impact of trade and economic activities
- More small-scale renewable energy projects to tackle poverty and reduce climate change

What can health workers and campaigners do to combat climate change?

- Demand and campaign for
 - cuts in greenhouse gases beyond the Kyoto targets
 - rich nations to contribute to the Climate Change Fund to enable poor countries to adapt
 - efforts to make the health care system where you work carbon neutral and environment-friendly
- Publicise the serious health threats posed by climate change and prescribe ways of tackling them.
- Promote health programmes that simultaneously improve health and protect the environment by reducing car travel and increasing time spent walking or cycling



Transport and travel are major drivers of climate change (NRSC/Still Pictures)