



earthwise

News and Ideas for UCS Members and Activists

Voters Back Clean Energy—Again

Overshadowed by midterm election results was the news



that voters in Washington State had passed the Clean Energy Initiative. This set of policies represents the latest in a series of state-level efforts to move toward energy independence while combating global warming.

The new law includes a renewable electricity standard that requires the state's largest utilities to generate 15 percent of their electricity from renewable resources such as wind, solar, and bioenergy by 2020. In addition, the utilities must pursue low-cost energy conservation options for their customers. By 2025, these policies could reduce annual global warming emissions by 4.6 million metric tons—equivalent to taking 750,000 cars off the road. UCS contributed to this victory by releasing a report on the initiative's benefits and providing its supporters with financial, outreach, and other strategic assistance.

Washington is the twenty-first state to adopt a renewable electricity standard and the second to do so via ballot initiative (Colorado was first in 2004). We hope to leverage this building momentum in the states by pushing for strong federal renewable energy legislation (see "Take Action" on p. 3).

close to home

A Personal Climate Solution

Global warming is the most serious environmental problem facing the world. Recent studies have concluded that in order to avoid dangerous climate change, the United States and other industrialized nations must reduce their global warming emissions to 20 percent of the current levels by mid-century.

This goal *is* achievable; taken over time, the reduction is equivalent to approximately three to four percent a year. Nevertheless, meeting this goal will require strong leadership at the federal, regional, and state levels, and consumers must do their part as well. To help reduce your household emissions, we offer the following strategies.



If everyone reduced their household's heat-trapping emissions by about four percent each year, we could avoid the dangerous consequences of global warming. Your transportation choices go a long way toward achieving this goal.

Sweat the Big Stuff

The car you drive is likely your household's biggest source of global warming pollution, releasing 25 pounds of heat-trapping emissions for each gallon of gasoline it burns. The most obvious solution is to drive less; the average American drives 15,600 miles per year, so a four percent reduction would be equivalent to driving about 12 fewer miles per week. Carpooling, walking, bicycling, or taking public transit just a couple days a week can easily achieve these savings.

Better gas mileage also makes a difference—just one to two more miles per gallon reduces your vehicle's global warming emissions by four percent. You can improve your car's fuel economy by:

- minimizing high-speed driving (fuel economy drops 17 percent between 55 and 70 miles per hour);
- applying modest, even acceleration and braking;
- idling for no more than 30 seconds (which gets you zero miles to the gallon);

(continued on back page)

on a personal note

Will We Lose Our Local Heritage?



Late last year, UCS collaborated with a group of scientists to examine the changing climate of the northeastern United States. We had previously conducted similar analyses for California and the Great Lakes and Gulf Coast regions, but this latest study really hit home for me personally. Born and raised near Boston, I've seen firsthand the changes our report documents and the effect they can (and will) have on local communities.

I grew up spending my winters outdoors with friends, playing pond hockey, building snow forts that towered over our heads, and tobogganing down hills. And it wasn't terribly long ago that refreshingly cool summer nights allowed us to forego air conditioning, since heat waves were few. As I grew older, I noticed that the pond hockey season grew shorter each year, and the snow forts melted more quickly. Air conditioners became more important to enjoying the hotter summers.

Sadly, our research findings confirm that the changes I recall are real and not a product of my nostalgia; annual temperatures in the Northeast have warmed almost two degrees Fahrenheit since 1970 (enough to decrease our snowpack and produce more heat waves).

As a father, I want my girls to experience the same beautiful seasons that I knew, and I want my future grandchildren to grow up in communities that are healthy and prosperous. This dream I share with all parents won't be achievable unless we dramatically reduce our global warming emissions from every source. Fortunately, the Northeast has shown signs of willingness to help lead the nation toward this goal. UCS has helped persuade eight states in the region to join the landmark Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which will begin reducing heat-trapping emissions from power plants, and eight states to adopt California's stringent vehicle emission standards.

We hope other states adopt these forward-thinking policies and develop new ones so that we may all continue to enjoy the wonderful traditions of our many unique communities.


KEVIN KNOBLOCH, *president*

UCS in the news



UCS exposes climate disinformation campaign

On January 3, UCS released a report detailing ExxonMobil's campaign to confuse the public about global warming. Report author and investigative journalist Seth Shulman described how the oil company has funneled nearly \$16 million to a network of 43 advocacy organizations that tout the work of a small group of climate change contrarians. These so-called experts misrepresent the scientific consensus that global warming is primarily driven by the burning of fossil fuels. In a telephone news conference, UCS Director of Strategy and Policy Alden Meyer said, "ExxonMobil has manufactured uncertainty about the human causes of global warming just as tobacco companies denied their product caused lung cancer."

The report generated substantial media coverage. An Associated Press story ran in newspapers nationwide, while *Democracy Now!* distributed news of the report to 500 radio stations. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN Headline News, and Bloomberg TV also covered the story. 

Make a Lasting Impact

You can help ensure a safer, healthier planet for future generations by including UCS in your estate plans. For more information about charitable bequests, gift annuities, and other legacy giving opportunities, please contact Adam Kessler at (800) 666-8276 x8040 or akessler@ucsusa.org. Or, visit www.ucsusa.org/ucs/join/legacy-gifts.html.

America Deserves Cleaner Electricity



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What's at Stake

Energy security, clean air, and a stable economy.

How You Can Help

Ask your U.S. representative to co-sponsor a national renewable energy standard.

What's Happening

The majority of our nation's electricity is generated from fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas, which contribute to air and water pollution as well as global warming. Fossil fuels are also vulnerable to supply shortages and disruptions that make energy prices volatile. Fortunately, renewable energy resources such as the wind and sun provide a cleaner, more reliable alternative. A renewable portfolio standard (RPS), which requires utilities to generate an increasing percentage of their electricity from renewable resources, would accelerate the development of these resources on a large scale.

U.S. Representative Tom Udall (D-NM) and others have introduced legislation to establish a national RPS of 20 percent by 2020. UCS has shown that this legislation would generate many environmental and


economic benefits for the United States, including:

- A 15 percent reduction in power plant emissions of carbon dioxide, the gas primarily responsible for global warming
- \$49 billion in consumer savings on natural gas and electricity bills
- More than 350,000 new jobs
- More than \$16 billion in new farm income

- More than \$72 billion in capital investments for renewable energy facilities in rural communities

RPS bills have passed in the Senate three times, only to be defeated in the House. However, many newly elected members of Congress campaigned in favor of renewable energy, and with new leadership in the House and a high level of public support for renewable energy, we are more hopeful than ever that Congress will at last pass this important legislation.

What You Can Do

Contact your representative and urge him or her to support a clean, reliable, and affordable energy supply for the future by co-sponsoring the national RPS bill. You can send an email from the online UCS Action Center at www.ucsaction.org. Or, call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to your representative's office. 

drawing conclusions



A Personal Climate Solution (continued from front page)

- using tires with low rolling resistance (which can improve fuel economy three percent); and
- keeping tires properly inflated.

When the time comes to buy a new car, choosing a model that gets significantly better mileage than your current model will help you achieve several years' worth of emission reductions at once.

Energy consumption is also a leading source of household emissions, with heating and cooling equipment, lighting, and major appliances topping the list of energy hogs. Start by replacing traditional (incandescent) light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, and older appliances or equipment with Energy Star-rated models, then consider buying "green power" (electricity generated from renewable resources such as the sun and wind) to offset your electricity-related emissions. This is an easy and relatively inexpensive way to reach or exceed your four percent emission reduction goal.

Smaller but still effective steps include insulating attics, crawlspaces, and ducts, and sealing air leaks around windows and doors. Lowering your water heater's thermostat 10 degrees (or to 120 degrees Fahrenheit) or your heating thermostat by two degrees can both reduce your energy use three to five percent.

While harder to quantify, shopping at your local farmers market or buying regional foods will also reduce your household's emissions (by minimizing the amount of transportation required to get your food to the dinner table).

Power in Numbers

If you're already well on the way to achieving your share of the "four percent solution," encourage your friends, family, neighbors, local businesses, and elected officials to take up the challenge. Calculate your total household emissions and find additional emission-reduction strategies at www.climatestar.org.

UCS on the web

Take the harm out of pharma crops. Food crops engineered to produce drugs and industrial chemicals could pose serious health risks if they enter our food supply. Visit www.ProtectOurFood.org to find out whether pharmaceutical or industrial crops are being grown in your state, and join in our efforts to push for safer alternatives.

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a member of Earth Share

dialogue



How can compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) be "environmentally friendly" if they contain mercury?

CFLs consume about 75 percent less electricity than incandescent light bulbs, and therefore can reduce energy demand—and harmful emissions—from power plants. If every American household replaced just one incandescent light bulb with a CFL, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that we would reduce global warming emissions equal to taking nearly 800,000 cars off the road. The lower energy demand of CFLs also translates into lower electricity costs for consumers.

One drawback to CFLs is that they use a small amount of mercury (about five milligrams) to generate light. However, this pales in comparison with the amount produced by the largest source of U.S. mercury emissions: the coal-burning power plants that produce 52 percent of our nation's power. For example, the average existing coal-fired power plant emits 13.6 milligrams of mercury to power a typical incandescent bulb, but only 3.3 milligrams for a CFL. The reduction in mercury emissions achieved by burning less coal exceeds the five milligrams of mercury inside a CFL.

And unlike coal-fired power plants, which emit mercury directly into the atmosphere (where it most affects our health), the mercury in CFLs can be contained as long as you dispose of them properly. (All fluorescent bulbs are considered hazardous waste and should be handled according to local regulations.)

To learn more about energy-efficient lighting, visit the Energy Star website at www.energystar.gov.

