News
EarthBeat



(Unsplash/Rod Long)

by John R. Platt

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 2, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Editor's note: *This story originally appeared in The Revelator and is part of Covering Climate Now, a global journalism collaboration strengthening coverage of the climate story.*

A recent poll found that people today, especially younger people, feel helpless when it comes to fighting climate change.

Here's the thing: That’s exactly how polluting corporations *want* you to feel. The more people believe their actions don't matter, the more they find themselves rolling over and accepting the status quo.

Yes, solving the climate crisis requires bold action from governments and corporations, but that doesn't mean individuals have to sit on the sidelines. Not only do our actions add up and influence others, we also have the ability to push for — and demand — systemic change.

And that push, importantly, can help turn our individual feelings of hopelessness around. Psychologists and climate activists tell us we can go from feeling helpless or hopeless about the future and toward a more positive, productive attitude just by taking a few steps forward.



Done correctly, these steps we take can also create a momentum for the future. As scientist Katharine Hayhoe wrote last month: "If we wait for someone else to fix the problem, we'll never solve it. But when we raise our voices to call for change, when we take action together — that's when we find that hope is all around us."

With that in mind, we've created a simple action plan for the next 30 days. They include small steps we can take to advocate for bigger societal changes — and in the process remind us that the power for change lies in ourselves, too.

Start at the top:

1. Submit a public comment on proposed federal rules or regulations. You can find opportunities to voice your support or concerns at regulations.gov. You might be surprised how few comments have already been submitted, or how much your voice might matter.
2. Write to your senator to demand action on climate — either in general or about a specific legislative action. (Find your elected officials' contact information here.)
3. Write to your congressional representative with a similar request, perhaps one more tailored to your district. Remember, your voice as a voter counts 365 days a year, not just on Election Day.

Now think local:

4. Write to your mayor or other community leader about how you see climate affecting your region and encourage them to take action.
5. Write to your town parks manager and ask about their plans to keep green spaces open in the face of warming temperatures, wildfires and increased extreme storms.
6. Attend your local planning board meeting and speak out about any projects you feel don't pass environmental muster. You can't stop runaway development without getting in front of the people who make the decisions about what goes where.
7. Attend a school board meeting to support educators' efforts to teach science (or, you know, to verify that they're actually teaching it in the first place).

Next up, the corporations:

8. Write to a major corporation or retailer to offer feedback about their business models — for example, overpackaging. Can't find a public email address? Sometimes it pays to take photos and share them on social media.
9. Take this a step further and sign on to support producer responsibility legislation.
10. Now strike closer to home. Write to a top employer in your town or county to ask about their climate policies or request they adopt more sustainable business practices. (The more specific, the better; it shows you know and understand their business and their role in your shared community.)
11. Ask your energy company about switching your account to renewable sources. The more customers who sign up to get their power from wind or solar, the better.
12. Hit 'em in their stock portfolios. If you or your town, company, church, pension plan or friends have any investments in fossil fuels, intentionally or otherwise, divesting is a great way to send a message that profiting on destruction is no longer socially or financially acceptable.



(Unsplash/Dmitry Dreyer)

Focus on your neighborhood:

13. Walk — or run! — around your neighborhood with a garbage bag or two to pick up trash and recyclables, then post what you find to social media. (This isn't necessarily about shaming people; it's a good way to show our effect on the environment.)
14. Attend a larger cleanup day in your area. Connect with local activists and organizations while you're at it. You're going to need people to talk to about all of this, so build your community as you go along.
15. Find a Little Free Library in your area and stock it with environmentally themed books. You never know who might find and read them. (Don't have a Little Free Library near you? Talk to your local bricks-and-mortar library about setting up a display or webpage about their climate-related books and related materials.)
16. Ask how you can help an environmental justice cause in your area. We can practically guarantee some neighborhoods in your community suffer higher environmental burdens than others (if you don't know of any, one place to start your search is the Environmental Justice Atlas). Find out how you can support existing efforts or create awareness. Oh, and if you're in an area affected by these burdens, it's OK to ask for help.
17. Attend a protest. Add your voice to a public event demanding action while meeting like-minded people. (Pro tip: Buy a reusable whiteboard instead of making new posters that will just end up in the trash.)

Game the algorithms:

18. Share positive news. Fight the incentive for social media to focus on the stories and disinformation that makes people angry and tears us apart. The Earth Optimism and Conservation Optimism accounts are good places to start.
19. Follow a climate scientist on social media to amplify their voices. Check out Katharine Hayhoe's "Scientists who do climate" list on Twitter for ideas (or just bookmark the whole list).
20. Review a green product you like and write about the qualities that you find worthy of praise. In the online commerce world we live in now, products (and businesses) live or die by five-star reviews. (You can also give negative reviews

to products you find egregious, or those whose marketing claims amount to little more than greenwashing.)

21. Find climate-denying videos on YouTube (Tucker Carlson is a good start) and give them thumbs-down votes so fewer people get them in their recommendations. (Just don't watch too long: That way lies madness.)

Advertisement

Keep learning:

22. Ask your friends about their favorite energy-saving techniques. Do this online and you might end up with a lot of interesting suggestions that everyone can learn from. As Texas State University environmental studies professor Tom Ptak wrote recently, "When enough individuals make changes that lower daily household energy consumption, huge emissions reductions can result."
23. Start or join an environmental book club so you're up to date on the latest climate science or related issues (and can share with other like-minded readers). Here's a list of recent books to get you started.
24. Write to your local media — either a letter for publication about an issue, or just a friendly note to a local editor or reporter to praise their climate coverage. (You could also suggest they do more to cover it.)
25. Donate or subscribe to environmental news. A thriving independent press serves as an essential watchdog against corporate malfeasance and government corruption.
26. Set up a Google Alert for a topic you're passionate about. It can be as simple as "climate change," a topic like "sea-level rise," or more specific like "climate" and the name of your town.
27. Read up on a skeptic's argument so you can debunk disinformation when you encounter it — which you will.

Think longer term:

28. Sign up with a voter-registration effort in your area, or a voter-motivation effort through a national organization like the Environmental Voter Project — or make a plan to volunteer on Election Day. (You're registered to vote, too, right?)

29. Consider running for office or encouraging your friends to do so. The 2022 election is right around the corner, and too many races remain unopposed.
30. Donate to an environmental nonprofit to support the ongoing fight. Every dollar helps. Your time matters, too, so if you can't afford to give, there's probably a good way for you to donate your time by making phone calls, sharing petitions, stuffing envelopes or doing something that matches your particular skill set.

Wait, this month has 31 days!

31. Take some time to reflect on the past month. What worked? What didn't? What did you learn? What would you like to do again? What didn't make it onto this list that you'd like to try? Another month looms around the corner, and the opportunities to make a difference are endless — even as the time to act grows shorter.

[John R. Platt is editor of The Revelator, an initiative of the Center for Biological Diversity.]