

Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

2 of 20 Join us on Wednesdays and Fridays for Skills for Everyday Living, a series that goes beyond the classroom to prepare students for the many challenges of the real world. Our current topic is **Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions**, developed by *Facing the Future*. Series ends June 13.

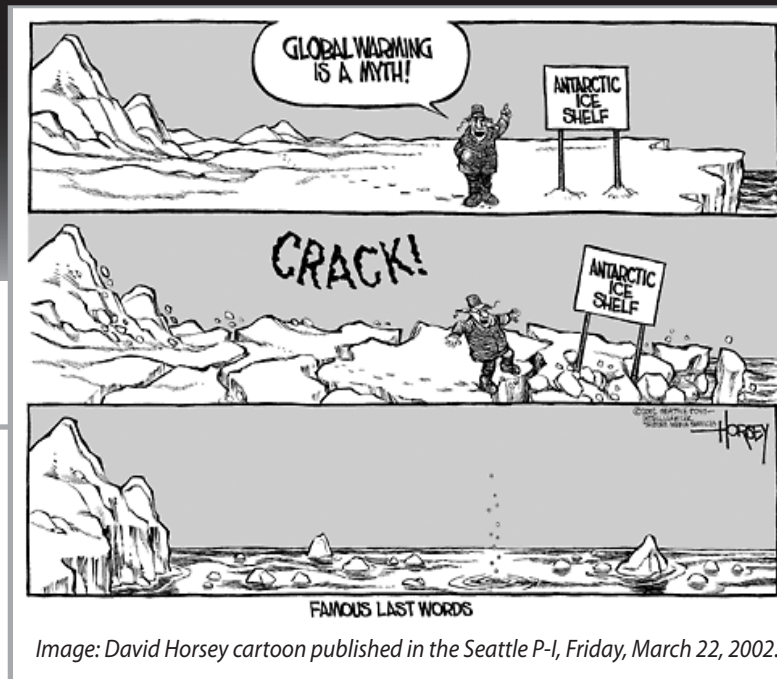


Image: David Horsey cartoon published in the Seattle P-I, Friday, March 22, 2002.

The Seventh Generation

Sustainability means that we meet our own needs without limiting the ability of people in the future to meet their needs. The “seventh generation” viewpoint of the Native American Iroquois Confederacy is a good example of what sustainability is all about. This viewpoint requires that tribal leaders consider the effects of their actions on their descendants through the next seven generations.

Finding Sustainable Solutions for Climate Change

Sustainable solutions to problems that people are facing today not only deal with present challenges, but also consider the well-being of future generations. The key to sustainability is first knowing what is necessary for a good life, and then figuring out how most people can have that and how future generations can have it as well.

Sustainable solutions to climate change must consider three broad areas: environment, economy, and society — each of which must be healthy and viable over time. Let’s look at a possible solution for climate change and whether or not it can be considered sustainable.

Wind energy can be used in many places to provide electricity without releasing the greenhouse gases that cause temperatures on Earth to rise. For wind energy to be a sustainable solution that will benefit us for many generations, it must be environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. Does wind energy provide a way to meet our needs today in such a way that future generations can also meet their energy needs?

Let’s first consider if wind energy is environmentally sustainable. If wind is a sustainable resource, this means that wind energy cannot be used faster than it can be replaced, or substituted for, and that its use does not damage the environment. How many and what kinds of resources are used for wind energy, and what kind of waste is created? How does its use impact ecosystems?

Next let’s examine the economic sustainability of wind energy. If wind energy is economically sustainable, it will have a positive impact on economic systems. Is it affordable? Does it create meaningful work and contribute to a community’s economic development?

Finally, let’s consider if wind energy is socially sustainable. Being socially sustainable means that it will not harm cultural and traditional resources and it will not benefit certain people while harming others. Does use of wind energy improve quality of life for all people? Does it preserve the cultural traditions or social institutions of present or future generations?

Two Types of Solutions

Throughout this series we will explore some “personal solutions” that individuals can take to bring about a more sustainable world. We will also discuss “structural solutions” that address the underlying causes of problems and often require action by governments, nations and large organizations.

Both types of solutions are important because the solutions to many of the issues facing us today are interconnected. For example, you may not be able to recycle (a personal solution that can reduce your greenhouse gas emissions) if recycling services are not available in your community. You can, however, encourage local governments to offer recycling in your community (a structural solution).

It’s All About You!

In many ways, sustainability is about making choices as an individual. The choices we make as individuals influence the choices that we make as a society. And the choices we make as a society can have a global impact.

Eating foods grown closer to home can reduce carbon emissions from transporting food long distances. Using buses, trains and bicycles to get where you need to go rather than using a car can also reduce your contributions to climate change. Recycling helps, too: It takes less energy to make an aluminum can, plastic bottle or piece of paper* from recycled materials than from raw materials.

It’s About All of Us!

Structural solutions occur primarily through government decisions and policies. All governments, regardless of their type, create policies and laws that encourage or discourage certain economic and social behaviors in their populations and in other nations. Policies designed to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change have been created at all levels of government, both in the United States and abroad.

Some schools have even gotten involved in structural solutions. Redmond High School and other schools are working to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions as part of the Cool Schools program. They set targets each year to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions produced by their school and then measure the progress of their energy conservation and recycling efforts.

Activity

- Send a letter to your U.S. senator telling him or her about your climate change concerns. Ask him or her to take a specific action (such as signing a climate treaty or supporting development of energy sources that do not emit greenhouse gases). To find your senator’s name and address, visit www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm.

Take Action!

- Visit www.facingthefuture.org and click on *Fast Facts & Quick Actions* under *Latest News from Facing the Future*. Click on *Climate Change*, then choose one quick action and get started. Be sure to tell your friends and family how you are taking action on climate change, and get them involved.

* Guy Dauncey and Patrick Mazza, “Stormy Weather: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change” (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001).