

CLIMATE CHANGE: WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE YOUNG GENERATION

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High tide flooding in Miami-Dade County

Source: The Nature Conservancy. [nature.org](https://www.nature.org)

By Nagham Mashraqi

Living in Florida, I'm no stranger to the incredibly high temperatures in the summertime and the occasional floods that make us joke that one day our state will be completely underwater. The unseriousness surrounding conversations about our climate combined with our tendency to brush off the things we don't understand proves that we are negligent of the dangers our planet faces. What is now varying temperatures and the occasional strong storm will eventually turn into mass floods and a major loss of natural resources.

The pressing issue of climate change is something that Gen Z

grew up learning about in school and through news outlets. They are aware of the fact that they are faced with this problem ahead of them, despite having no contribution to it. The generations that have existed before them have scared the natural integrity of the Earth since the era of the industrial revolution, without considering the consequences. Now, with the threat of global warming looming over their heads, the younger generation seems to be the main group that is worried about the state of their planet. They are actively protesting and educating themselves on this very real issue, all while older citizens live unaware

or even in denial of the damage their children will inherit.

Climate change as observed on our planet today consists of major changes to Earth's temperature as a result of human activity, not including changes that occur naturally due to small changes in Earth's orbit. The recorded warming of the atmosphere starting from the 1800s as well as the contrast in how fast this climate trend progressed ensures that humans are the cause of this problem. Excess gasses such as Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere are a direct consequence of the industrial revolution, as society gained reliance on nonrenewable fossil fuels. With the current warming trends leaving no doubt that humans have affected the Earth's climate, they must be aware of the responsibility they have to change it.

The past few years have shown substantial evidence of climate change affecting today's society. One major issue has been the threat of ice caps melting. With the increase of atmospheric gasses allowing the atmosphere to trap more heat within the Earth, ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica have decreased in surface area. Since the early 1990s Greenland has lost about 279 billion tons of ice per year while Antarctica has lost about 148 billion tons per year (NASA). Massive ice melts contribute to the threat of sea level rising, having caused the global sea level to rise 8 inches in the last 100

years (NASA). This increases flooding along the coasts and threatens cities in these areas from being submerged in the next several years.



Greenland Ice Sheets
Source: CNN. cnn.com

Though the Earth's health is such a prominent issue facing society today, not much is being done at a federal level to combat human's negative impact. At least in America, the issue of climate change is not being taken as seriously as the consequences of it make it seem. Our country has a history of ignoring the threats of climate change, with Donald Trump choosing to back out of the Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation in 2020. Although president Joe Biden rejoined the agreement once he was inaugurated and has made progress through environmental policy, more work still needs to be done. President Biden has made goals to limit greenhouse gas emissions and require a higher dependence on renewable resources in the next decade, and some of these practices appear to be realistic. Despite this, the federal government has not carried out every promise

they've made, the President has promised to dedicate 11.4 billion dollars towards climate finance annually by 2024, but within the last two years, Congress has distributed only 1 billion dollars annually for climate finance (Lashof). At this rate there is realistically no chance that the initial financial goal will be reached, showcasing a lack of effort towards resolving the climate crisis federally. Without federal initiative taken to provide the resources and carry the responsibility of slowing the effects of climate change, no significant improvement will occur. Citizens are constantly encouraged to make small lifestyle changes that allow them to live more sustainably. Though these changes are positive, no real difference will be made without enforced legislation. This means taking the process of carbon dioxide removal more seriously and increasing the focus on clean energy.

This lack of initiative being taken by those in power and those responsible for the climate crisis means that Gen Z will unfortunately inherit the problems of their parents and grandparents. Gen Z, being heavily aware of the climate crisis, knows that they will be faced with this responsibility and tend to express their concerns. Mimi Fina, a 22 year old grad student at Florida State University originally from Tucson, Arizona, is aware of the threat of climate change looming around her and is worried about the

consequence of extreme weather phenomenon, "I think if we continue as we are things will get a lot worse, coral reefs, water rising, snowing in the Sonoran desert, the water crisis, tornadoes happening in areas where historically they have never happened, it is important to recognize how nature is affecting our life in ways it hasn't before". Gen Z is also taking the threat of climate change seriously because they are witnessing it firsthand. Mimi recalls the change in climate patterns she has seen growing up in Arizona, "normally there isn't snow in the desert urban areas of Tucson, Arizona, but twice in the last six years there was snow in February that stuck for about a week. It stayed throughout the whole day. I remember having snow as a child that would stay a couple of hours and only last overnight so this is a big change".

Gen Z, despite their age, has both the knowledge and experience to be aware of and understand the importance of combating climate change. According to a study done by Pew Research Center, 69% of Gen Z social media users have said they felt anxious about the future the last time they saw content regarding addressing climate change (Tyson et al). Out of those in the study, 59% of Millennial social media users reported having the same reaction, while only 46% of Gen X felt this way (Tyson et al). Having anxiety towards an issue as serious as this one and not being

able to do much about it except watch lawmakers ignore the problem should not be something Gen Z has to go through. They are not responsible for the excess greenhouse gas emissions, so they should not be the ones worrying the most about the task of reversing them.

Gen Z citizens are also the people who are more supportive and willing to work towards finding solutions to the issue. While most Americans support the exploration of alternative renewable energy resources, the older baby boomer generation is more reluctant to give up fossil fuels. The Pew Research Center study showed that 43% of Gen Z supports the idea of letting go of the country's reliance on fossil fuels, with 32% Gen X agreeing, while only 25% of baby boomers support this motion (Tyson et al). Another instance where Gen Z's compliance regarding the climate crisis can be witnessed is regarding the topic of gas powered cars. Over half of Gen Z and millennials support eventually letting go of gas powered cars while over half of baby boomers disagree completely (Tyson et al).

Legally, Gen Z cannot do a lot about the climate crisis now, half of Gen Z is not of voting age to have a say in what is going on with our planet, but they will be forced to live with the consequences anyway. The least the older generations could do is try and solve the problems they created by tackling the biggest contributors to

climate change. As Mimi claims, "I think that it really falls on the government to regulate large businesses more because a singular person's impact is not as great as a single corporation's impact that causes the most harm. Usually we are told 'what are you going to do about it' even though one person alone will not have enough impact". Even once they are allowed to vote, Gen Z will never be able to work hard enough to reverse the decades of damage done to our planet through mass production, and their small efforts now to be more environmentally friendly will do almost nothing in the grand scheme of things to reduce humanity's carbon footprint.

Despite this, there are many instances of Gen Z stepping up to fix something they didn't break. The younger generation is constantly seen protesting for the federal government to enact change before their planet suffers beyond the ability to repair. Many schools and universities have their own environmental preservation clubs and organizations that work to educate others.



Climate Change protest in New York City
Source: Pew Research Center. [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org)

If there is to be any hope for Gen Z's future with this planet, initiative needs to be taken by those who are more responsible and willing to work for the climate change effort. The idea that because a problem's consequences will outlive you means that you don't have to worry about it needs to be abandoned. Those responsible and those with power need to learn from the spirit of Gen Z and act fast to preserve the integrity of the planet and work to undo the damage done by the generations before them.



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