

## **Climate Change: Not a Joking Matter**

**Nicole Bowman—Opinion Piece—11/28/2012**

Every day, we find ourselves concerned with minor details. We contemplate what to wear, what to eat for lunch and how to schedule our day. But why don't we take a step back? Take a moment and look at the big picture—would these components of our lives be possible in a world that could no longer support us?

Climate change represents this threat on a long-term scale, yet many Americans are not concerned. Environmental policies often take a spot on the back burner, recycling gets scoffed at and politicians joke about glacial ice melting. Why does this topic not concern more people?

Carolyn Copenheaver, associate professor at Virginia Tech in the Department of Forest Resource and Environmental Conservation, emphasizes the importance of considering the past and future when looking at climate change.

“It is always easier to speak about the past and nearly impossible to predict the future,” Copenheaver said. “Therefore, we [scientists] know and can quantify how the climate has changed in the past, but we don't really know what it will do in the future. We know even less about how people will behave in the future.”

Many people do not consider climate change when looking toward the future. A popular claim is that climate change is a conspiracy, not accurately supported by factual information. This would be understandable—if it were true.

According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the current global warming trend is very likely caused by humans and is proceeding at a rate unprecedented in the past 1,300 years.

Statistics also show that September Arctic Sea Ice is declining at a rate of 11.5 percent a decade. Antarctica has been losing 24 cubic miles of ice per year since 2002. Combined with the melting land ice in Greenland, this excess water is causing a significant increase in sea level.

Global climate statistics, new weather patterns and rising sea level all provide evidence that climate change is occurring. Most recently, Hurricane Sandy has served as a wake up call for many who view the storm as evidence of climate change.

According to [www.climatecentral.org](http://www.climatecentral.org), scientists cannot yet determine if Hurricane Sandy directly resulted from climate change. However, it is evident that climate change effected Sandy's intensity.

Scientists believe that three climate change-related factors influenced the storm's power: higher sea level, warmer sea temperatures and a [strange weather pattern](#) that may be the result of a loss of Arctic ice.

Despite the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy, some are finding a silver lining in the storm's destruction. Many Americans are reacting with an increased awareness and interest in climate change.

According to a post-election poll commissioned by [Climate Nexus](#) and conducted by Penn Schoen Berland, there has been a national increase of 36 percent in the number of people who strongly agree that climate change is affecting weather.

Thomas Thompson, Virginia Tech's crop and environmental sciences department head, believes the world should approach climate change by focusing on how we can adapt to possible changes—especially the increase in population projected

over the next 50 years. Thompson believes that this increase, combined with changes to the water cycle produced by climate change, should be an issue of concern.

“We have to increase food production almost two-fold within essentially a 40 year period of time,” Thompson said. “If water is going to become an even more serious constraint on crop production [due to climate change], then how are we going to do that?”

While it is clearly important to adapt to changes, it is equally important to do our part in preventing climate change. Companies such as Johnson & Johnson have aimed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, while other companies like Starbucks strive to use recyclable materials.

However, climate change will take more than a scattered effort among the world’s leading companies and organizations—it will take a global effort among each individual.

The task is not as daunting as it sounds. There are plenty of small changes to your daily life that can help reduce your environmental impact. From recycling to purchasing environmentally friendly products, the Environmental Protection Agency has several ideas on their [website](#).

Next time you hear the phrase “climate change,” remember it means more than just changing weather patterns in the distant future. Climate change has the capability of drastically changing the lives of future generations. We can do our part to prevent this, while also adapting to changes. If we fail to react, then who will?