

# THE NEW WORKER

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### **Global Warming and Our Professional Responsibilities to Reverse It**

In November 2016, the United Nations Summit met in Marrakesh, Morocco to discuss the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Many believe that the Paris Agreement represents our best international effort to reduce carbon emissions and reverse the potential devastation of climate change, which was perpetuated largely by our overreliance upon fossil fuels, according to most climate scientists.

Within and among professional groups, we need to utilize our collective power to influence the federal government to act against allowing further damage to our planet. There is little time for this, and we must make our declarations clear. To what do rehabilitation professionals agree with when it comes to negating or reversing the human causes of climate change? When will we make these decisions? And, how long will it take for us to act? To be honest, the need for group action is increasingly important, especially with new political leaders negating and downplaying the validity of global warming and the importance of reducing carbon emissions to the atmosphere.

The American Psychological Association (APA), the American Medical Association (AMA), and the American Bar Association (ABA), among other professional groups, have offered positional statements regarding their understanding of climate change and its human consequences. These groups call for governmental action to reduce carbon emissions. After all, 97% of climate scientists agree that climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities, and most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this reality.

The APA's Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change has produced a report that addresses topics regarding the relationship between climate change and psychology. The task force also issued policy recommendations to "encourage psychologists to become involved in understanding and responding to human and psychological dimensions of global climate change."

According to the AMA, "Scientific evidence shows that the world's climate is changing and that the results have public health consequences. The American Medical Association is working to ensure that physicians and others in health care understand the rise in climate-related illnesses and injuries so they can prepare and respond to them. The Association also is promoting environmentally responsible practices that would reduce waste and energy consumption."

The ABA passed a resolution on February 11, 2008, to take a leadership role in addressing the issue of climate change through legal, financial, educational, and policy mechanisms. The ABA also urged Congress to take multiple steps within its power to recognize the compelling nature of the science and protect human life.

It is time that our government leaders hear from all professional associations, including counseling and rehabilitation groups. I offer to my colleagues what will sound like a challenge with some degree of personal shame. As an adult, a father of three, and a rehabilitation professional, I regret that I have not fully utilized my knowledge, resources, and available opportunities to help resolve the social injustices associated with climate change and to argue for changes in public policy that will ultimately benefit the larger human community. It goes without saying that no individual can reverse the effects of climate change; however, in no aspect of my personal and professional life are my failures to speak up and take action more reprehensible than the challenge of man-made global warming. Halting climate change will require an international effort, but that effort begins unabashedly with each of us individually as well as in association with others who will endeavor to protect the planet.

With a desire to help and a strong interest in encouraging others, I very recently made rather innocuous inquiries into whether two of the associations to which I belong had position statements similar to those of the AMA and the APA. The responses were quite similar, “We are not a lobbying organization.”

Setting aside my personal embarrassment and feelings of helplessness, I want to cite the remarkable efforts of *Our Children’s Trust*. The *Trust* brought together 21 American children and young adults, ages 9 to 20, to press the claim that inaction on climate change represents an intergenerational injustice. We can all take some degree of pride in knowing that young people have not given up. At the same time, I am embarrassed to say that many professional organizations, including several to which I belong, have contributed much less to the collective effort to insist that policymakers make laws to combat climate change.

In *Kelsey Cascadia Rose Juliana; et al., v. United States of America, et al.* (including “big oil” and other major industrial interests), with the *Trust’s* assistance, the plaintiffs filed a lawsuit in 2015. The judge hearing the case wrote: “...the intractability of the [climate change] debates before Congress and state legislatures and the alleged valuing of short-term economic interest despite the cost to human life, necessitates a need for the courts to evaluate the constitutional parameters of the action or inaction taken by the government. This is especially true when such harms have an alleged disparate impact on a discrete class of society.” The discrete class of society, of course, is young people more than anyone else.

After hearing oral arguments in September 2016, U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken issued an order on November 10, 2016, that denied motions from the fossil fuel industries and the federal government to dismiss the case. The youths in *Kelsey* have thus far prevailed!

In a separate case at the state level, *Our Children’s Trust* convinced King County Superior Court Judge Hollis Hill in Washington State to rule that the State’s Department of Ecology has a “mandatory duty” to protect the air quality for future generations. In May 2016, after hearing a case brought by four teenagers, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ordered the State to follow through on its greenhouse gas reduction pledges.

I must question: What have I done lately? What steps have I taken to confront and challenge the government’s failure to mitigate the effects of fossil fuel-driven climate change? Moreover, in this regard, what are the contributions of professional organizations assigned with the responsibility of helping others, not simply young people, but all members of society, who are most vulnerable to the deleterious effects of global warming?

We have evidence that without action, the effects of climate change can cause catastrophic social and political consequences. It is scientifically documented that from circa 2006 to 2011, Syria experienced its worst drought in approximately 900 years. Syria's urban population increased when farmers migrated into cities alongside refugees from war-torn Iraq. Water became scarce and food very expensive. As the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman noted in his article, "Without Water, Revolution," the drought has contributed to the uprising. Syria, as we once knew it, is no longer.

Climate scientists have predicted that climate change will lead to rising sea levels, increasing droughts, and the growing frequency of monster storms that will leave millions of people without essential resources, including water and shelter. It's time for all the professional organizations to which we belong to step up and make their voices known – *global warming is not a hoax!*

More than 360 U.S. businesses have signed a statement calling on President-elect Trump to support the Paris Agreement on climate change, including General Mills, eBay, Unilever, and dozens of other companies. Their statement reads, "Implementing the Paris Agreement will enable and encourage businesses and investors to turn the billions of dollars in existing low-carbon investments into the trillions of dollars that the world needs to bring clean energy and prosperity to all."

The federal government's leadership must continue to appreciate the human contribution to climate change, as there are 193 Signatories who have endorsed the Paris Agreement, including the U.S. under Obama's administration. Science and most of the world have agreed that global warming is real and the human community must do something about it.

History has shown that some leaders (and sometimes a benevolent ruling majority) will ignore the plight of a society's disadvantaged and most vulnerable members during crises. Let us do what we can to make sure this does not happen in America.

All professional organizations in the United States, particularly those dedicated to reducing suffering and advancing human development, should make their collective voices known to this country's leading climate change deniers. What is your professional organization doing to make its position known on global warming? Without action – majority action – to actualize climate justice and reverse the human causes of global warming, we will have failed as professionals, citizens, and parents.

## **The Danger of Silence**

For those of our readers who may not appreciate our declarations regarding political inaction on assuring our global future, please consider, respectfully, that silence is *not* golden. Check out the words of Clint Smith in "[The danger of silence](#)" at TED.com. It will take less than 10 minutes of your time and will be well worth it.

## **Canada & Climate Change**

Canada has long been a supporter of clean energy and technologies. In fact, Canada is the self-proclaimed leader in the fight against climate change. Canada's government posted on its website that it will strengthen its environmental position with new investments in clean energy and clean technologies. These investments include plans to:

- Endow a \$2 billion Low Carbon Economy Trust to fund projects that reduce carbon.
- Fulfill their G20 commitment and phase out subsidies for the fossil fuel industry.
- Work with the Provinces and Territories to develop a Canadian Energy Strategy to protect Canada's energy security, encourage energy conservation, and bring cleaner renewable energy into the electricity grid.

Let's follow our neighbor's lead and urge our government to abandon fossil fuel resources like so-called "clean coal" and invest in programs to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy sources. For more information on Canada's environmental goals, [click here](#).

## **Tree Planting: A Living Legacy for America's Fallen**

Throughout its life, a tree takes carbon dioxide from the air, and the carbon gets stored in the surrounding soil. Subsequently, the tree will release oxygen back into the environment, thus improving air quality. Planting a tree is one of many simple ways to help combat climate change and other environmental degradations that seem all too prominent today.

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground (JTHG) Partnership endeavors to share American history through structured tourism and educational programs. Beginning in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and ending at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Virginia, the JTHG National Heritage Area not only grants visitors a unique interaction with the many battlefields and historical sites within the region, but also with the natural beauty that surrounds it.

The goal of the Living Legacy Tree Planting Project, a JTHG initiative, is to plant one tree for every soldier claimed by the Civil War – that is, a total of 620,000 fallen soldiers. The project, spurred by the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War, uses the natural beauty of trees and foliage to create a living symbol of sacrifice and memory. The completed project will span four states and become the first 180-mile landscaped allée.

The project, when complete, undoubtedly will highlight the serenity commonly discovered among our nation's historical memorials. Not only will the result spark contemplation and be beneficial to our historical narrative, but it will also be helpful to our environment.

An acre of trees absorbs enough carbon dioxide over one year to equal the amount produced by driving a car 26,000 miles. The Living Legacy Tree Planting Project may not only help to instill memories of the past, but perhaps this "living" memorial, and other similar initiatives, can help create an environmental legacy for our future as well.

[Click here](#) if you are interested in donating a tree or learning more about JTHG and the Living Legacy Tree Planting Project.

[Click here](#) to learn more about trees and their role within the climate change dialogue.

## Trash for Cash!

It's time for the rest of the world, including U.S. businesses, to learn from Sweden's waste treatment program, which [revolutionizes energy through recycling](#). More than 99% of household waste in Sweden is recycled. Swedes separate all recyclable waste in their homes and deposit it in special containers.

The 32 recycling plants in Sweden today produce heat for 810,000 households and electricity for 250,000 private houses. Heavy metal emissions have been reduced by 99% since 1985, even though Sweden emits 3 times more waste today.

Waste is a relatively cheap fuel, and Sweden has developed a large capacity and skill in efficient, profitable waste treatment. About 50% of household waste is [burnt to produce energy](#) at incineration plants. Sweden even imports 700,000 tons of waste from other countries.

From the ashes, metals are separated and recycled, and the rest, such as porcelain and tile, which do not burn, is used in road construction. About 1% remains and is deposited in rubbish dumps.

The smoke from incineration plants consists of 99.9% non-toxic carbon dioxide and water, but is still filtered through dry filters and water. The dry filters are deposited, and the sludge from the dirty filter water is used to refill abandoned mines.

In Sweden, burning waste to produce energy is uncontroversial, but in other countries, [like the U.S., it is a much debated topic](#). What do you think?

## New Trends in Solar Power

Solar power is all the rage these days. Many companies are taking on the challenge to make it more appealing than the original, giant, metallic solar panels.

Just last month, Tesla CEO, Elon Musk, unveiled the company's newest product – solar roof tiles that look exactly like traditional roofing tiles. Tesla's tiles are made from tempered glass. The material is extremely impact resistant and is actually more durable than regular roofing tiles. Tesla expects to start installing its solar roofs next summer. They will be available in faux terra cotta and slate designs as well as a couple of other styles. The slogan, "Power from above, beauty from the street" captures the product perfectly. [Take a look at them for yourself!](#)

In addition to glass tiles, many companies are embracing the new technology of printable, flexible solar cells. The cells are so pliable they can effectively turn any surface into a solar array – including buildings, vehicles, or even clothing. [Click here for more information.](#)

Researchers at Virginia Tech have even developed a new type of flexible solar panel that can absorb both the direct light of sunlight as well as the diffuse light of LED, fluorescent, and incandescent lighting. The flexible, lightweight design means that solar power doesn't have to be a fixed technology, but can be a fully mobile one, working outside and indoors. [Check it out here!](#)

## **Resiliency at Work**

We are fortunate to live near the University of Pennsylvania where the Positive Psychology Center presents groundbreaking research on resilience and its practical application. We suggest that you make an online visit to the [Positive Psychology Center's webpage](#) to learn about the Penn Resilience Program. Also, [click here for five ways to boost your resilience at work.](#)