

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

There's no going back

For decades, Ohio's Cuyahoga River, which flows through Cleveland, was one of the most polluted waterways in the country.

It suffered numerous fires, but the blaze of June 22, 1969, was so dramatic that it led to the creation of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. The state took legal action against numerous industrial polluters, including a steel company dumping cyanide into the river, and in the following decades water quality improved dramatically. There are now more than 40 species of fish living in the river.

An environmental success story.

Climate change is much different. The recent unprecedented heat waves in Seattle and Portland, the wildfires from California to Canada, the droughts in the West, ranging from "severe" to "extreme," are all part of the new normal. Things won't get better even if we stop greenhouse gas emissions tomorrow.

But emissions are continuing to rise, and what seemed like something that would happen in the distant future is happening now.

Last week, researchers at Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany warned the Gulf Stream is slowing and much closer to collapse than previously thought.

For thousands of years the Gulf

Stream, like a conveyer belt, has carried warm, salty water from the tropics east across the Atlantic to Europe, where it sinks and carries colder water back to the Americas along the ocean floor.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

If that circulation pattern shuts down, it would bring extreme cold to Europe, raise sea levels along the U.S. East Coast, and disrupt seasonal monsoons that provide water to much of the world.

Global warming threatens to disrupt it. As recently as 2019, the United Nations projected the Gulf Stream would weaken in this century but not collapse for at least 300 years.

Now scientists are not so sure.

As Penn State climatologist Michael Mann says, "We are 50 to 100 years ahead of schedule with the slowdown of this ocean circulation pattern, relative to what our models predict."

Our human default position, of course, is to think that tomorrow will be much like today. Disasters are something that happen to somebody else, in a faraway land. And if something bad happens, we can make it better.

Not so with climate change.

We must take responsibility in Pottstown to do our part to mitigate climate change.

More Thursday



A 1969 fire in the heavily polluted Cuyahoga River, which bisects Cleveland on its way to Lake Erie, led to a major cleanup of the waterway. Today the river is healthy and supports more than 40 species of fish.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS DIFFERENT. The flooding, heat waves, wildfires and droughts such as we've seen in recent weeks can no longer be prevented, no matter what we do. We can only keep things from getting worse.