

How We Can Save the Planet

Mayer Hillman (with Tina Fawcett), Penguin Books, 2004. ISBN 0-141-01692-2

Summary of the book's key messages

Climate change is the most serious threat faced by mankind

Tony Blair has identified it as 'unquestionably the most urgent environmental challenge'. Sir John Houghton, former head of the Met Office, has called global warming a 'weapon of mass destruction'.

Climate change will affect the planet for tens of generations to come, and is very likely to make more of its regions uninhabitable. The threat cannot be overstated.

Damaging impacts are already evident

Nearly all the hottest years since records have been taken have occurred since the mid-1980s. The world has seen an average temperature rise of 0.6°C. Even this apparently small rise has led to mountain glaciers retreating, sea levels rising, and rainfall patterns altered. In the UK, spring is arriving up to 3 weeks early.

Possible future changes are extremely alarming

If greenhouse gas emissions go unchecked, a global temperature rise of up to 6°C is predicted by 2100 (the same difference as between the Ice Age and now). By 2050, more than one million species could become extinct and 150 million environmental refugees created. An even bleaker future is likely if the process creating global warming accelerates beyond our control, as evidence suggests may already be happening.

Energy use is the key source of the greenhouse gases causing climate change

Our use of coal, oil and gas is responsible for over four-fifths of UK carbon emissions. Their concentration in the atmosphere has risen by a third since the Industrial Revolution.

Current action is far from sufficient

Global emissions are continuing to increase along the 'worst case' trajectory. Government has not yet responded adequately to the enormity of the problem. And industry has no magical technical fixes that can assure us that realistic targets can be met. In the UK, half of all emissions stem directly from energy use within the home and personal transport by road, rail and air, in the proportions shown in the pie chart alongside.

Charting personal UK direct carbon emissions by source

An effective policy framework is needed at national and international levels

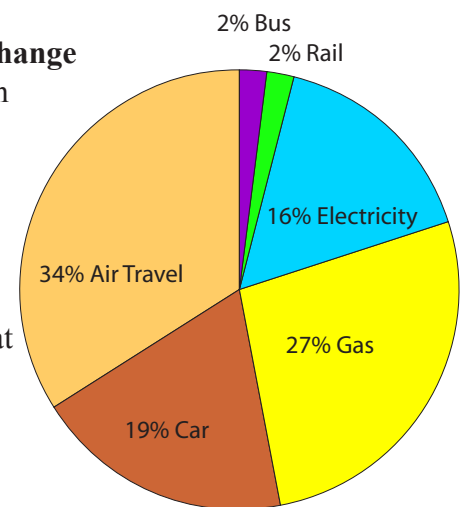
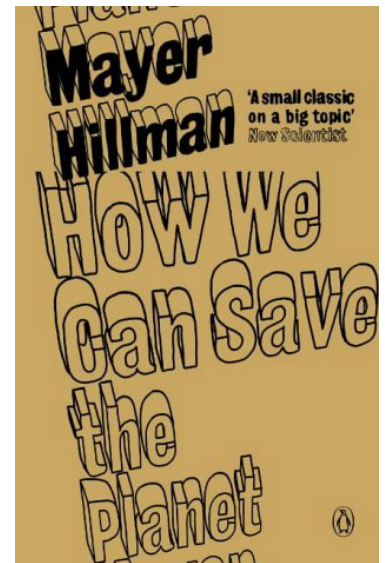
Globally, the only framework for agreement which has any chance of success is *Contraction and Convergence*, as devised by the Global Commons Institute. It is based on the principles of security and fairness. It involves a cap on global emissions, to keep concentrations in the atmosphere below dangerous levels, and a phased programme of carbon dioxide allowances for all by an agreed year.

As part of this global agreement, the UK will have to reduce its overall emissions by between 60% and 80% by 2050. The fairest way to achieve this reduction is the allocation of equal carbon 'rations' or allowances per person which decrease over time. Everyone must face up to their responsibility for climate change, and take steps to reduce their burden on the planet.

The moral imperative

If we in the developed world do not agree to restrict our own carbon dioxide emissions, there are only two possible outcomes: either there will be an inevitable and devastating intensification of the problems caused by climate change, or we will have to prevent people in poorer countries from having their fair share in the energy required to maintain even a basic standard of living.

There is no third way. Doing nothing is not an option.



Ten key actions

1. Wise up! Find out about climate change by reading, watching TV programmes or searching the web (eg www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange <http://worldwildlife.org/climate/> or www.climateark.org)
2. Calculate your own carbon dioxide emissions: find out how much you contribute to global warming by using a carbon calculator (see **How We Can Save The Planet** or www.safeclimate.net/calculator/ or www.bestfootforward.com/carbonlife.htm)
3. Drastically reduce or stop flying: it is not only the most damaging means of travel but it is also associated with long-distance journeys (www.chooseclimate.org/flying) requiring more fuel consumption.
4. Save energy at home: insulate, turn heating down and use hot water sparingly
5. Buy energy efficient appliances: look at the labels and see how much energy they use. Pay more if necessary. It will save money (and the planet). For energy saving products and grants available, see www.saveenergy.co.uk or call the energy efficiency helpline on 0845 727 7200
6. Switch to a renewable energy supplier (see www.greenprices.com)
7. Change your travel patterns: walk or cycle for local trips, use the bus rather than drive, use local shops and services, use local schools, take holidays close to home, get rid of the car or use it a lot less
8. Talk with people about what you are doing to save energy and prevent climate change
9. Join an environmental pressure group like Friends of the Earth
10. Call on the government to press for a global agreement on the *Contraction and Convergence* of greenhouse gas emissions: fair shares for all is the only way to save the planet from dangerous climate change.

The book enables you to calculate your own emissions - it does not take long - and then enter into a pact with yourself and your household to reduce them significantly. What are the emissions from your use of energy? How do these compare with the national average? More importantly, how do they compare with what is necessary to meet future reduction targets – 3 tonnes by 2020 and 1.5 tonnes by 2030? Instructions on how to do this are provided.

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Mayer Hillman

Penguin £7.99 ISBN 0141016922

As reviewed in the New Scientist Magazine 24th July, 2004.

“BEING a town planner, social radical and iconoclast, Mayer Hillman has a way of getting to the heart of things. Twenty years ago, he pointed out that most journeys are made on foot - something transport planners had never considered. A decade ago, he turned our ideas about the freedom of the road on their heads by pointing out that our cars had driven our children off the streets of our cities. Now he wants to save the world.

How We Can Save the Planet is not a well-meaning environmental plea. It is a hard-headed blueprint for how to counter global warming, “the most important issue of our age - perhaps of any age”. It is practical but visionary; personal but political; lucid but rigorous.

No other book tells you more clearly how to calculate your own contribution to greenhouse emissions. No other book sets out more clearly how the rich world is plundering the planet’s last and greatest free resource - the space left for greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. And no other book illuminates so well why a rationing system, giving each nation a pollution entitlement based on its population, is the only solution.

A small classic on a big topic.”

Fred Pearce