

# What Can I Do about the Climate Emergency?

(A LOT! HERE'S HOW!)

Everybody's practical guide to what they can do *against* climate chaos and *for* a just and thriving natural and human world

Rebecca Solnit

If you're worried that it's too late to do anything about climate change and we should all just give up, I have great news for you: that day is not coming in your lifetime. As long as you have breath in your body, you will have work to do.

—Mary Annaise Heglar

# Contents

## Introduction

### Get Started

- 1) Get Informed
- 2) Choose Your Scale
- 3) Find a Group
- 4) Direct and Indirect Consequences

### The Four Main Areas for Action

- 1) Fossil Fuel
- 2) Democracy and Human Rights
- 3) The Human Landscape
- 4) The Natural World

### Give Your Own Life a Tune-Up

(Climate Footprints for You—and Your Wallet)

I know so many people who feel hopeless, and they ask me, “What should I do?” And I say: “Act. Do something.” Because that is the best medicine against sadness and depression.

—Greta Thunberg

# Introduction

The climate movement needs you. In this pamphlet, we outline some of the ways you can join it, and we share examples of how ordinary people have found their role, their power, their impactful projects, and their climate community. There's a place for you in the crucial work of speeding the transition away from destruction and toward thriving. Figuring out where your skills are useful and what you can stick with is important. Identifying whom to work with and what to work on is crucial. Some of us are good at staying with a legislative issue for a season or a year or a decade. Some of us are good campaigners. Some like protests and are ready to blockade and risk arrest. Some of us are home-bound but can make calls and write letters. It all matters.

One of the best and most challenging things about the climate crisis is that there is no one solution. That is, the solution is a mosaic of many changes. The way we get to a world that doesn't run on fossil fuel

**Caveat:** This guide is for people in the US who want to act, because every country has its own laws, structures, movements, problems, and opportunities, so activism isn't one size fits all. But we hope people in other countries have made or are making their own guides, and this guide, though copyrighted, is available to circulate for free to anyone who wants to share it (with credit to us).

and instead centers justice, sustainability, and community is happening in hundreds of thousands of ways—this coal plant shut-down, that methane-gas ban, these electric schoolbuses and bike lanes, that solar rooftop, these offshore turbines, that grasslands protection. These need to be sped up and amplified. National legislation and international treaties matter, but so do the countless small pieces that add up. It's not just about what we need to stop but also about the rejuvenating work of building the world we want.

Start by finding people who share your concerns and who remind you that you're not alone. Become informed about climate—there is a lot of misinformation yet also a lot of good information out there—and talk to others about it in ways that motivate. Bring it up in conversations and do so with good facts and perspectives (this, too, counts as activism). Remind people that the problems are urgent, but well understood, that we all have a role to play in addressing them, that we have the solutions, and the real obstacles are political. And they can be overcome. Some of them have. Many more need to be.

This is both a terrifying and an exciting moment. We are deciding the long-term future. While that task is daunting, the tools—notably renewable energy—to choose the best route forward keep improving and multiplying, the public is far more engaged than it was only a decade ago, and, while we are still far from where we need to be, some significant victories are behind us.

To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (“They don't mean me”) or by despair (“There's nothing we can do”). Each of us must find our work and do it.

—Audre Lorde

**“No one is too small to make a difference”:** In 2020, law students in Vanuatu—a small South Pacific island nation greatly threatened by climate change—asked themselves what they could do about climate. It’s easy to imagine that they could have said, “We’re just students,” or “We live in a remote place with little political power.” But they didn’t do that. They got the government of Vanuatu to take to the United Nations their case that the world’s highest international court should rule on the obligations of nations to address climate change. On March 29, 2023, in the United Nations, the measure passed with a unanimous vote. As Julian Aguon, a writer and lawyer indigenous to Guam who worked on the case, put it, “By providing authoritative advice to all nations, the court could unlock the power of international law to bring about the kind of transformations that the climate crisis requires. For the first time in history, the court could set out in well-defined and transparent terms the responsibilities of states to protect both the climate system and the rights of present and future generations from climate-induced harms.”

## Get Started

### 1) GET INFORMED

Being knowledgeable about climate gives you tools to make good choices as an activist, voter, and consumer—and to help others understand and engage in all your climate conversations. There’s a lot of good and bad information out there, and vetting your sources is important. There’s also a lot of grim news—which is often sudden, dramatic stories of disasters and ecosystem collapse. There’s also a lot of positive news that doesn’t fit the mainstream news format because it’s incremental or technical. A wildfire or flood fits the news format well; the statistics on how fast the use of renewable energy is rising or breakthrough research on better battery materials and storage mostly does not. (For example, solar power is being installed at a rate of a gigawatt per day, the equivalent of one new nuclear power plant going online every day, according to energy expert Danny Kennedy—but there’s no single day to mark that astonishing speed and impact.) The Inflation Reduction Act, the United States’ biggest climate bill, included so many programs that few understand all that it contains, good and bad.

- We’re proud of the anthology we put together as an introductory overview of the situation, titled *Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story from Despair to Possibility*. Its

twenty voices from around the world cover everything from movement history to oil politics to voices from the South Pacific to philosophical equipment for facing hard things to climate victories (along with an online guide for teachers). There are a lot of climate books out now, about everything from climate emotions to the energy transition.

- Some newspapers, notably the *Guardian*, which has no paywall, have great climate coverage. There are also a lot of good climate newsletters and news services now, including Bill McKibben's Substack *The Crucial Years*, Emily Atkins's *Heated*, Inside Climate News, Canary Media (covering the energy transition), Carbon Brief, and Yale E360, as well as specialized newsletters, blogs, Substacks on renewable energy, climate justice, and more. Good podcasts include Leah Stokes and Katherine Wilkinson's *A Matter of Degrees*; Hip Hop Caucus's *The Coolest Show*; Christiana Figueres's *Outrage and Optimism*, on climate politics; and David Roberts's *Volts*, on climate technology, especially renewables.
- Following climate scientists, climate groups, and organizers and these sites on social media can also be informative. 350.org has self-led courses to help you skill up your climate knowledge. George Washington University put a big list of sources together on climate news: <https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/sources-for-climate-news/>. Make sure you're looking for the solutions too. Follow The Solutions Project on social media for great stories of communities building the future we need.

But, remember, you don't have to know everything. No one does. The climate crisis and climate policy and solutions are a huge subject, or rather many subjects now, encompassing many kinds

of science, technology, politics, economics, psychology, and much more, and there's a lot of news every day. Figuring out your information diet is part of sustaining yourself as an activist. What encourages and equips you to act? What answers your most pressing questions?

## 2) CHOOSE YOUR SCALE

Scale is an important starting point. Scale, as in: *How much can you do, what are you ready to take on?* And scale as: *Do you want to work on something in your own neighborhood or town, or your state, or a national or international campaign?*

Maybe your life is already really full, and with your limited time you can just call your senators or write letters, along with voting and donating and maybe the occasional burst of activity. Or maybe you've got more flexible time, and you can travel to a pipeline blockade or become a key part of a climate group. Maybe your job can be or is climate related, whether you're a teacher who can incorporate climate into your curriculum or anyone who can address how their workplace or place of worship uses energy, disposes of waste, and organizes transit. Maybe you have specialized skills—as a lawyer, a cook, a medic, an artist, a climber—who can help a climate organization or an action.

National climate legislation gets a lot of attention—but it's important to remember that that's not the only scale on which change happens. Even when a climate denier is in the White House and climate-action opponents dominate Congress, blue states continue making their own climate policies and setting their own standards—and, increasingly, red states are adopting renewable energy because it's cheap and effective: Texas and Iowa are leaders here. Also, policies passed in blue states—especially California, with its huge population

and economy—can and do help shape national standards. And sometimes those national standards influence other nations.

Cities, alone and as national and international organizations of mayors, can and do set important climate standards and goals. Counties also make important climate decisions around protecting or exploiting land and managing energy and resources. “Wherever you live in this country, there are decisions being made right now about where your electricity will come from,” says Mary Anne Hitt, who led the Beyond Coal campaign to shut down coal-burning power plants and stop others from being built, “and those are decisions that need your voice.” Even though Beyond Coal was a national campaign, each power plant was a local struggle. They shut down those 372 coal plants one by one with the help of local communities.

“Coal provided half of our nation’s electricity,” when the

**“The climate crisis is really a fossil-fuel crisis.** There are other components, for sure, but eighty per cent of it is the burning of fossil fuels. And scientists now know—and this is a relatively new finding, a very firm understanding—that, once we stop net additions to the overburden of greenhouse gases, once we reach so-called net zero, then temperatures on Earth will stop going up almost immediately. The lag time is as little as three to five years. Scientists used to think that temperatures would keep on worsening because of positive-feedback loops—and, tragically, some aspects will keep getting worse. The melting of the ice, for example, will continue, though we can moderate the pace of that; the extinction crisis will continue without other major changes. But we can stop temperatures from going up almost immediately, and that’s the switch we need to flip. Then, if we can stay at true net zero, half of all human-caused greenhouse-gas pollution will fall out of the atmosphere in twenty-five to thirty years. So we can start the long and slow healing process almost immediately, if we act.” —Al Gore, 2023

campaign started, Hitt noted in 2021, “and we were told it was always going to be that way. Well, we’re now getting less than 20 percent of our power from coal, and this year the US will get more electricity from renewable energy than from coal for the first time ever. If I could leave you with one thought, it’s this: we are the architects of our energy future—not the fossil fuel industry.”

Climate actions that matter can be anything from one school putting solar over its parking lot or swapping diesel for electric schoolbuses to global actions and treaties. They can be a lawsuit against a fossil fuel corporation or enforcement of environmental legislation. Some of you may be really good at going to your town council’s meetings and sticking with an issue until it passes (or even running for office or writing and pushing for introduction of climate legislation). Some may be moved to join a campaign against a pipeline or a dirty power plant.

Some might want to work to get climate-positive candidates elected or protect natural places—forests, grasslands, bogs and swamps, oceans—that sequester carbon and are part of the climate solution. Some may want to stand with the communities most impacted by fossil fuel and climate change, from Alaska to Alabama, inner cities to remotest indigenous land bases. There’s a lot to be for and a lot to be against.

An important distinction is between inside and outside. You can work outside the system (by which we mean the various government entities making climate decisions), work outside to influence what’s going on inside, work directly with insiders, work as a go-between helping the two sides talk to each other, work inside to bring to the insider decision-making process what outsiders are demanding. Some of us feel more comfortable, safe, or effective in one or the other. Outside matters. So does inside. You can trace how many monumental decisions made by the one of the three federal branches of

government—Congress, Supreme Court, presidency—ended there, in victory. But they began with often overlooked grassroots organizing and cultural activism that led to shifts in how the public thought about an issue or how aware people were of it—and then convinced the public and politicians to support it.

### 3) FIND A GROUP

You may want to join an organization that you feel at home in or excited by—and there are so many climate groups now. There's almost certainly one working on climate near you, and very likely one working on the issues you consider most important—and if there isn't, you can start one. There are groups for specific campaigns (like opposing pipelines), others for specific constituencies.

For example, the Sunrise Movement is for young people; Third Act is for people over sixty and, like Sunrise, it has local chapters all over the US; Dayenu calls itself “a Jewish call to action”; the Hip-Hop Caucus is as hip as it sounds and has long done great work on climate; Extinction Rebellion and spinoffs such as Scientist Rebellion focus on direct action; 350.org, which was an early climate-action organization, has many chapters around the country in which people work on local issues; longtime green groups such as Earthjustice, the Sierra Club, and Greenpeace work on climate, too. There are also many grassroots and community-led organizations building a diversity of solutions in their towns. Often, there are local or statewide groups to divest a pension fund or protect a mountain or pass specific legislation. A lot of university campuses have climate groups, too. Religious groups have also become leaders at the forefront of pushing for sustainable change.

The climate scientist Dr. Katharine Hayhoe has put together a good list at <http://www.katharinehayhoe.com/faqs/#climategroups>.

**Small and local victories** can scale up or have an impact beyond the local. In July 2019, Berkeley city councilwoman Kate Harrison introduced a measure, the first in the country, to ban gas hookups in new buildings. It passed unanimously—yet it was overturned by the courts in 2023 because of how it was written (and because it scared the hell out of the gas industry). It would be easy to say, *Oh that's just Berkeley*, or *What does one city matter?*, but that measure became a model for fifty cities in California and New York City. The state of Washington passed similar legislation, while New York state banned gas stoves in new construction.

That is, even while the measure may have failed for now in Berkeley, it succeeded in a much bigger way. It's always worth remembering that even if you don't win immediately or in the end, you may nevertheless have impacts that matter. The gas ban took place as experts and news outlets began to acknowledge that methane gas inside buildings has bad consequences for human health. We like to think that, in fifty years, people will regard the practice of piping a highly explosive and toxic gas into our dwellings and workplaces as an incomprehensibly bad idea.

Also, check out The Climate Justice Alliance to find groups led by frontline community members.

Normally I'm against big things. I think the world is going to be saved by millions of small things.

—Pete Seeger

#### 4) DIRECT AND INDIRECT CONSEQUENCES

It's easy to think that if there's no immediate and direct consequence from activism, it didn't do anything. But big public protests remind politicians and the media what the public cares about and ramp up the pressure for climate action. Seeing other people care also has an impact. A recent study concluded that what Sweden's Greta Thunberg, now twenty, has done as a climate activist has impacted people in Switzerland. A third of the Swiss people surveyed reported that they had changed their everyday habits—what they ate, how and how far they traveled, what they bought—as a result of her advocacy. It took a study to measure the impact, but actions matter whether or not someone measures them.

You may need to decide whether you need tangible consequences to feel effective and decide to get behind a specific issue or campaign, or whether you want to be part of a broader movement. Democratic politicians increasingly support strong climate action because climate activists and the public sent them the message that that's what we want and changed the conversation so that things that once seemed extreme or unlikely now seem possible, reasonable, and necessary.

Another way to be an activist if you have the means: donate money. That's how you translate your own labor into support for a climate organization's labor on the issue. But there, too, you want to be informed—your money might do a lot more if you give to a local campaign that can be won in the next election or an effective small group with few overhead expenses than to the big green group that sends you all that mail.

Small wins create momentum to keep people engaged, so you can move on to bigger wins. In this

**In 2010, at age nine, Nalleli Cobo was getting nightmarishly sick** from the oil wells right across the street from her family's home in South Central Los Angeles. She and her mom went door to door to organize their Latino neighborhood and document the illnesses people were experiencing. At age nine, Nalleli became the spokesperson for the group People Not Pozos (People Not Oil Wells) that campaigned to shut the wells down. They won that battle three years later. She went on to cofound the South Central Youth Leadership Coalition, which filed and won a lawsuit against the city for environmental racism. "A community that people saw as invisible ... made that change, made history. We made history," she declared. She didn't stop there, despite a bout of cancer, and is still a climate leader and a winner of the Goldman Prize and other honors.

Almost no one is too young or too old to be a climate activist. Bill McKibben writes, "I was recently at a retirement community giving a talk and afterwards they took me up to the nursing wing to meet one of the super volunteers there. She was confined to a bed because she was ninety-seven and quite frail, but she was writing ten and fifteen letters a day because she wanted to continue having some effect on the world that she loved. And meanwhile, for the young people getting them, it turns out if you're seventeen, there's a reasonable chance no one really ever wrote you an actual letter before in your life. And so they're quite powerful."



# The Four Main Areas for Action

## 1) FOSSIL FUEL

It is some very effective marketing that has convinced so many of us that getting off of fossil fuels is a sacrifice as opposed to a money-saving, peace-promoting, water-protecting, health-improving, technological leap forward.

—Dr. Elizabeth Sawin

The single greatest cause of climate chaos is the burning of fossil fuel—coal, oil, and gas. So the single most important thing we need to do is stop burning it, by stopping it from being extracted, refined, shipped, purchased—all the steps on the way to burning it in our machines, be they power plants, farm equipment, household devices, or cars, trucks, trains, ships, and planes.

The single biggest obstacle to doing what it takes to ensure a stable and livable planet is the fossil fuel industry, which is hellbent on profiting and destroying as long as they can—so, going after the fossil fuel industry and its allies, notably politicians, at every point of vulnerability, is essential work.

This includes:

- stopping specific projects—this extraction site; that refinery, the next pipeline
- stopping the fossil-fuel industry’s power to shape policy and influence politics in conflict with the well-being of the earth
- stopping the governmental subsidies and financial arrangements that help make destroying the earth so profitable
- going after the industries—notably, banking; investment; and the insurance industry—that are crucial to the functioning of the fossil-fuel industry
- pressing power companies to make the transition to clean energy
- stopping the scale-up of plastics manufacturing
- passing legislation that phases out fossil fuel and supports renewables
- and, pressuring media outlets to cover the issue fully and fairly.

The good news is that activists have built campaigns at every pressure point of the industry. Some of the accomplishments—such as \$41 trillion divested from fossil fuel since divestment campaigns began around 2011—have been stupendous. The less good news is that we need to do a lot more.

Solar and wind are now the cheapest bulk power sources in 91 percent of the world, and the UN’s International Energy Agency (IEA) expects renewables to generate 90 percent of all new power in the coming years. The energy revolution has happened. Sorry if you missed it.

—Amory Lovins, 2022

Most people believe a clean-energy future will require everyone to make do with less, but it actually means we can have better things. There are obviously a lot of barriers to accomplishing this plan. I tell people what is technically necessary, and they tell me about political barriers. As naive or implausible as it sounds, we have to figure out how to remove all of those barriers—one at a time, and then, hopefully, many at once. Policymakers have to change what they believe is possible in the current political and economic climate. If what is politically possible is the extent of their ambition, everyone is doomed.

—Saul Griffith, *Electrify* (2021)

## 2) DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Democracy and voting rights are climate issues. Given real choices over how energy is generated and controlled, over transit options, over food and farming and land management, over economic justice and social equality, the majority of voters in the US want the things that are good for the climate. Protecting voting rights protects the climate.

While there are lots of faults to find with the two-party system, some Democrats are now climate champions, and most support climate action. Republicans oppose it, and they're also increasingly aggressive enemies of voting rights. The Republican Party has long worked to gerrymander districts to favor Republican voters and to prevent poor, young, and BIPOC people, especially Black people, from voting—both by taking away that right and making it harder

to actually vote. Protecting the right to vote, encouraging registration to vote (and legislation to make it easy), and motivating voter turnout is important climate work. Maybe your piece of the climate picture is getting those voters and those votes.

In 2022, the US Senate came close to passing the Biden Administration's Build Back Better plan, but all Republican senators and one Democratic senator blocked it. That senator, coal baron Joe Manchin of West Virginia, eventually supported the more compromised, less ambitious Inflation Reduction Act that did pass later that year. Remember the extraordinary 2020 Senate races in Georgia that elected two Democratic senators to replace two Republicans, making its passage possible—then imagine if there'd been even more voting rights activism, and one more (non-oily) Democrat had been in the Senate: a much stronger bill could have been passed.

Elections matter, campaigns matter, voting rights matter, democracy matters for the climate. Also check out local or statewide utility companies or public utility commissions. It's so important to organize so that people have a say over their energy, and getting involved with your utilities is a great way to start. For example, Georgia's public utility commission has been predominantly white for so long, and this has led to decisions that have hit low-income residents. It's time to get utilities on track to support energy justice.

There's another way to think about democracy and justice when it comes to climate: the richest 1 percent of humanity has twice the climate impact of the poorest 50 percent, according to Oxfam International in 2020. The Global North has emitted most of the greenhouse gases, historically, and profited from the industrialization underwritten by the burning of all that coal, oil, and gas, but the Global South and the circumpolar North are particularly hard-hit by climate chaos. So, a global picture of democracy might

include what the wealthy nations owe to the poor ones, the North to the South, and the rich to the poor. Even beyond that lies what we human beings owe the other species whose earth it also is, and what we who are alive now owe those who will be born in ten and a hundred and a thousand years.

There's a story that begins here, or maybe it ends.  
It depends on us.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

### 3) THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE

We need to stop both the production and consumption sides of fossil fuel. Production means fighting the fossil-fuel industry and its support system; consumption means what the rest of us do, individually and in our largest systems, from shipping to energy generation to infrastructure. To address consumption doesn't just mean electrifying everything—though that's a big part of it. It's also a design issue: we need to redesign the places we live to make them more climate friendly. Getting people to shift from cars to bikes (electric or otherwise) and public transit matters. And, of course, for people to use these means of transport, they need to live in places where it is safe to ride bikes and walk, where things are close enough together for buses and trains to work, where public transit is safe and thriving.

Working to create or protect these better designs not only addresses fossil fuel and climate, but it can also make better neighborhoods, cities, towns, communities—safer; more just; more inclusive of old, young, poor residents; more beautiful; more resilient places of richer social connection and connections to nature. We also

need to ensure that these new sustainable systems benefit all people—and not just the well-off or middle class. We need to build towns and cities that give everyone access to safe housing, affordable electricity, good transit, clean water/air, and healthy food.

A friend just wrote me, “I’m now working at our city’s bike and pedestrian advocacy org, Bike Pittsburgh, helping neighborhood groups develop and run grassroots campaigns to increase access to safe walking and biking. Affecting change at the hyperlocal level that chips away at car culture is incredibly satisfying.”

Cities and towns adopting curbside composting reduce the potent greenhouse gas, methane, that is generated by decaying food in landfills and create good fertilizer to go back into the soil from which our food comes. Street trees do what all trees do—pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere—but they also shade and cool cities and provide bird habitat.

There are now countless good ideas for improving the places we live. Some of them save energy or are part of the transition to clean energy—solar roofs or painting roofs white to lower the amount of cooling they need in hot places or banning gas hookups in new construction, to name a few. Some make the everyday environment more livable and safer. Some address the risks of climate change by addressing flooding, heat waves, fire, and creating physical or social safety systems to handle them—ranging from figuring out how torrential rain will drain to assessing the preparedness of neighborhoods for climate disasters (and a lot of that preparedness consists of good relationships with the neighbors, who will be the first responders taking care of each other when the disaster strikes and the system fails—and when rebuilding commences).

I live in a city with good bike paths, curbside composting, the option of signing up for 100 percent renewable electricity, and legis-

lation that will ban gas furnaces and water heaters starting in 2027. The city has committed to 100 percent clean electricity in the near future and 100 percent clean energy by 2040. I cite this not to boast about my city but to say that each of these things happened because of citizen action, and you can be one of those citizens to make your city more user-friendly and climate-positive. Or you can run for office and do even more as an elected official. Just following what's being decided at the citywide or county level and showing up for the meetings (or maybe campaigning for the good stuff and against the bad) is important climate action.

Farming and food production (as well as the production of timber and paper from forests and other organic materials) are also part of the human landscape. Farming can either strip-mine or restore the soil, and healthy soil itself sequesters carbon. Likewise, farming can be powered by renewables or fossil fuel, be organic or use deadly pesticides, employ labor justly or exploit workers. The production as well as the consumption of food is a climate issue, in other words. Industrial agriculture—and the deforestation that sometimes takes place to make way for it—is another huge source of climate change. There are better ways to raise food and tend the land, and they are already out there, but they need to expand as destructive agriculture contracts, just as renewables need to expand as fossil-fuel use contracts.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but  
nothing can be changed until it is faced.

—James Baldwin

#### 4) THE NATURAL WORLD

The climate was, until burning fossil fuel and other impacts destabilized it, a beautifully orchestrated system of oceans, forests, ice, weather, seasons, migrations, and more. Protecting the natural world protects the climate—and one great, hugely ambitious plan for this is “30 by 30,” a phrase referring to a global effort to protect 30 percent of the earth's land and oceans by 2030. The Biden administration actually committed to this goal in a 2021 executive order, but making it happen will take grassroots involvement (including the prevention of right-wing anti-environmental attacks). California, Nevada, Hawaii, Maine, and other states have versions of 30x30 in their jurisdictions, and others have legislation pending.

A lot of attention has been given to forests in recent decades—but now that so many forests are prone to burning, they sometimes put more carbon into the air than they pull out. Still, they need protection and deforestation is a major source of climate change. Bogs, wetlands, grasslands, kelp forests in the ocean, and the oceans themselves also sequester carbon and also deserve protection, for the climate and for themselves, and when describing these places it's worth remembering that the animal life in them, from zooplankton to whales, reindeer to songbirds, as well as plants and microorganisms, are also vital parts of these systems. The biodiversity crisis and the climate crisis have usually been talked about separately, but they impact each other.

Protecting the natural world also means protecting it from fossil fuel extraction. From the Arctic to the tropics, from the arid lands of New Mexico scarred by fracking to the deep-sea oil extraction in the Gulf of Mexico to the mountaintop-removal coal mining of West Virginia to the pipelines prone to spilling in streams, lakes, and rivers, fossil-fuel extraction is environmental

destruction. You can approach this in two ways, by going after the extraction or seeking protection of these places.

Since this is a guide to climate activism, we'll note that a huge number of environmental organizations and projects exist to protect the natural world, from national organizations ranging from Greenpeace and Earthjustice to the Center for Biological Diversity to small groups (and local Sierra Club chapters) to stop this logging or protect that river. The general principle that you can work on this at the national, state, or local level is as true here as anywhere. Likewise, you can concentrate on protecting one place or aspect of the ecosystem, support an organization that works on many aspects, or advocate for legislation that does this work.

An important detail: we are an industrial civilization, and we cannot stop being one all at once. Renewables also require materials acquired through mining—but, according to one report, they require less than one five-hundredth as much mining. The issue of where this mining should take place is an important one, as is who decides. (There's now a Minerals Security Partnership comprising Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Sweden, the UK, US, and the EU. Its principles include the statement, "This growth must not be at the expense of the environment, human health, or human and labor rights.") But no mining whatsoever is not an option, and it's also important to remember that extraction for renewables is necessary to terminate the extraction of fossil fuel that also happens, on a far larger scale, in beautiful, fragile, and significant places as well as places claimed, inhabited, and cherished by Indigenous people. One of the best solutions to protecting our natural world is ensuring that Indigenous rights are honored and land ownership is restored to Indigenous communities.

## Give Your Own Life a Tune-Up

### (CLIMATE FOOTPRINTS FOR YOU—AND YOUR MONEY)

It is absolutely good to reduce your climate impact through what you buy, eat, and do; how you travel; and other things you have control over. But there are two important things to consider: one is that we can't get to where we need to go just by everyone staying home and being careful about what they eat or getting on a bike. We need big change and we need it fast, and we will only get there by public engagement and collective effort. The other is that the fossil-fuel industry campaigned to get people to think about their own climate footprints to try to convince us that we're the problem and focus on ourselves instead of on them and system change.

That said, we know a lot about the potential positive impact of what you eat (less dairy and meat, especially less red meat); how you get around (foot, bike, public transit are better than cars, cars are mostly better than planes, and, of course, electric cars are better than gas-burning cars); and how you live (an electric house is better than a gas one; a compact home tends to require less heating and cooling; insulation and design matter; heat pumps are awesome for,

despite their name, heating *and* cooling—and reduce your energy bills because they’re so efficient). Less overall consumption and less wasteful consumption, in sum (and that includes packaging, particularly petroleum-based plastic and other disposable, short-life cycle items like fast fashion).

Another really important point is that what we do personally can be impactful in indirect ways. We influence each other’s behavior, and, if enough of us do something, it influences markets, infrastructure, and more. For example, if there are enough vegetarians or vegans, restaurants will serve options they can eat, and that will encourage and allow more people to choose those meals and make those choices seem increasingly mainstream. One of the major factors in whether someone puts solar panels on their roof is if their neighbors have done so. If enough people take up bicycling, the case for putting in bike lanes and bike lockups to encourage yet more people to cycle may result. The more people out there on bikes, the more drivers learn to coexist with them. The more people ride public transit, the more cost-effective it becomes and the more it reduces car dependency.

Too, individual behavior isn’t entirely individual: a lot of what is portrayed as personal virtue is more possible with collective effort. If others have campaigned successfully for bike lanes and traffic calming, it’s easier to become a bicyclist; if others have instituted curbside composting, you have a green option for your food and yard waste even if you can’t compost at home. And the personal becomes collective if you look beyond your home and your own consumption to what your school, workplace, synagogue, church, or temple is doing or should be doing but isn’t yet.

Even if you are leading an exemplary life, your money could be financing climate destruction. If you have significant amounts of money in any of the banks financing the fossil fuel industry—

especially Bank of America, Chase, Citi, and Wells Fargo—your money could have a far bigger impact than you do. There have been good campaigns to move your money, and if you do have money in banks or investments, doing what you can to make them fossil-free is a really good part of this work to tune up your personal life.

A lot of what we can do individually now will become inevitable in the future, when the age of fossil fuel comes to a close—which it will do, but we need it to happen fast. You don’t have to opt in to an all-electric house or an electric car if we stop building houses with gas hookups or letting internal-combustion cars on the market.

What you do matters. You have the power to participate in shaping the future. It’s up to you to find your focus and community; it’s up to all of us to do what we can to choose the best and avoid the worst future coming at us. We can’t see the future, but we can see how people in the past organized and struggled and persevered to create the best parts of our present. We can, like them, do our best to act so that people in decades yet to come will thank us for what is most thriving and abundant, most beautiful and stable, in their lives, just as we thank those past heroes. The future needs us: the future we are shaping in the present with what we do or don’t do. It’s a responsibility but also an invitation to find agency, alliances, and a sense of possibility, or rather to make them. To be our most powerful selves, to live by our ideals, to be moved by love for what is and what can be.

Now I see we are where we are today precisely because of large acts of resistance *and* small acts of resistance ... I believe we need organised resistance *and* the forms of resistance that become practices in our daily lives.

—Angela Davis