

It's Time to End Environmental Apathy

Lexi Anderson



It's effortless to give up and accept catastrophe.. Hope is much more complicated.

We are in a crisis of our own making. The planet is warming, climates are changing, and people are suffering. Yet, as the temperatures rise, so does the lack of accountability. I've encountered on social media, as well as among the younger generations, the attitude that "I don't have to change; it's not going to matter anyway."

As we begin to face this reality, a debate has started to splinter the message of climate activists. There are those who are adamant that corporate regulation is the only pathway towards a habitable planet, and that the individual approach steals relevance and urgency from the corporate critique. It's critical to realize, though, that the Earth is facing its most pressing challenge yet.

The [2019 UN climate report](#) shows that the past eight years were the warmest in history. We are hurtling past the Paris Agreement's goal of a 1.5 degrees Celsius rise by 2040. [Oceans are acidifying](#) at an alarming rate. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch currently measures an estimated 1.6 million square kilometers, and is comprised of plastic bags, bottles, straws, and countless other items that are thrown away on a daily basis. Its 80,000 ton mass is a direct result of environmental indifference, born out of avoidable waste, the result of generations of passivity.

We are all faced with a terrifying challenge, and it would be reckless to not take every possible measure to quell the storm haunting our horizon.

A multi-pronged approach, through not only large-scale regulation but also small-scale change, is our only hope. Our individual responsibilities, rotted by pessimism and swept out of sight by society, may seem inconsequential, but they add up. It's all our planet, and all our home. It's our duty as citizens of planet Earth to take the necessary initiative, and to not dismiss the gravity of grassroots action.

It's important to define the scope of action we are able to take, as no one is expected to abandon the necessities of daily life, and many environmentally friendly options are out of reach due to extenuating factors such as economic resources and availability. We live in a consumerist, carbon-centered world. Whatever we can do, such as limiting the number of plastic bags we contribute to landfills, starting a compost to help eliminate food waste, or being conscious about our heating and air-conditioning use, is what we must do.

March, lobby, and write your representatives for emission standards. They are a key, and detrimental cause to the crisis we are now immersed in. Boycott and protest, I'll be standing right next to you. What's crucial towards developing a productive environmental action plan is to recognize the importance of balance. Protest, *and* choose paper. Vote out coal lobbyists, *and* take public transit to work.

Growing up in Vermont, I was taught how to respect the forests before I learned to read. Our second grade curriculum was devoted to the natural organisms of the lake, where we would swim on hot summer days. I was raised with a compost in every café, and with gardens outside my classroom doors. Yet, as we grew, the environmental apathy did too. The same kids who raced through wooded trails in elementary school grew cynical about our shared future, adopting a "we're all gonna die anyways, I'm getting McDonalds" outlook on life.

As I sit on the precipice of adulthood, I see a future far more grim than the one that faced generations of seventeen-year-olds before me. Oceans are engulfing coastlines, storms are wreaking havoc on communities globally. Hurricanes are growing increasingly frequent, and increasingly brutal. Holes are being poked in our atmosphere, and species are slowly vanishing into the void of "extinct." I understand the pessimism, and feel the clouds that now obscure the future.

It's vital, however, to understand the importance of persisting. It's effortless to take the easy way out, give up and accept catastrophe. It's scary, but simple.

Holding onto hope is much more complicated. In order to nurture this sliver of possibility, we must not succumb to pessimism. If you're worried about methane gas puncturing the ozone, stop eating red meat, and go from there. There are steps we can take as individuals to assist in the process of climate cleanup, ways to subvert the "I care about the environment, but..." mindset. Do what you can, and create the change we need.

In short, use reusable bags. Choose paper over plastic. If you can, quit plastic straws. Recycle your bottles and compost your food. Small steps, if adopted by everyone, can limit the plastic choking our wildlife and polluting our waters, leading to far-reaching and noticeable change.

Our environment is at a critical juncture in history. The climate crisis is the single most expansive and omnipresent challenge that faces us in the next few decades. Without the

help of everyone, from grassroots operations in towns and cities, to mass protests and global environmental change, the future will continue to grow more grim. Our mission, as citizens of the planet earth, is to take responsibility, and to take action.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Climate Change, Activism

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* Lexi Anderson is a student at Champlain Valley Union Highschool in Hinesburg, Vermont. She is an editor and a staff writer for the Champlain Valley Chronicle, as well as a contributor to the Young Writers Project of Vermont. Her passions include the environment, human rights, and political theory, which often inform and shape her writing. She is excited to continue to share her work!

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