

Movie aside, global warming must be halted

By ADAM MARKHAM and CHRISTINE VANDERLAN
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Hollywood has weighed in on the issue of global warming with the release of the new movie, "The Day After Tomorrow." The soon-to-be blockbuster paints a worst-case scenario that far exceeds anything the environmental community and scientists studying climate change have predicted. Those consequences, for instance, do not include the freeze-drying of New York City or the blow-drying of Los Angeles. But they do include severe weather changes, crop losses, floods and subsequent economic problems that could profoundly affect millions and millions of people.

Here in New York, a warmer climate will intensify the smog that already reaches unhealthy levels in 30 counties across the state. By mid-century, some species of wildlife, including brook trout and sugar maple -- both state symbols -- may be gone.

Enough of the bad news.

The good news is that there are plenty of things we can do -- and many things being done -- to help us avoid the worst that global warming has to offer.

We have to use less energy produced by burning fossil fuels -- gas, oil and coal -- in our homes, vehicles and businesses. At home, we have to use compact fluorescent bulbs, purchase energy-efficient appliances, increase insulation, lower the temperature on the water heater and the thermostat and raise the temperature on the AC. The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's Energy Smart programs are available to help us conduct home energy audits and find energy efficiency appliances.

On the road, we have to start by maintaining vehicles so they are as efficient as possible, making sure tires are inflated properly and the engine is tuned. We have to buy the cleanest, most efficient vehicles. But mostly, we have to drive less and use public transportation, bicycles, and our feet.

At work, we can do all the things we can do at home, and much more. We can employ alternative energy technologies like wind, solar and geothermal, and use combined heat and power to reduce the amount of energy we do use. We can reengineer our processes so they use fewer resources -- and make us more competitive in the world marketplace. Hudson Valley Community College in Troy just installed a system that uses landfill waste gas to generate heat and electricity for the campus. Union College, Mohawk Paper and Environmental Advocates represent a growing number of area institutions, companies and organizations that have invested in wind-generated electricity.

We can do these things as a community, too. Cities and towns across the state are making smart energy use a civic virtue. The towns of Fenner and Madison in central New York have embraced wind energy, welcoming the extra income wind

turbines generate amid productive farmland. Croton, Red Hook and other Hudson Valley towns have chosen to purchase wind energy from the Madison County turbines to meet some of their electricity needs.

The city of Syracuse is replacing its traffic lights with highly efficient LED lights at a significant energy savings. And the town of Greenburgh is requiring that new homes be built employing energy conservation measures. These are just some of the sensible solutions under way.

Such efforts will help put us on the right path. But we cannot solve global warming through local action alone. Major sources like coal- and oil-burning power plants currently produce greenhouse gases in unlimited amounts. That's why New York is working with other states in the Northeast on a program to require electricity generators to cap carbon emissions. Governor Pataki has proposed that the state reduce global warming pollution 10 percent below 1990 levels by 2020.

We can help make that happen. And we must, because 2,000 scientists in 150 countries around the world agree: It's getting hotter, and if we don't do something about it now, there will be a lot less world to save when we turn it over to the kids.

So, go ahead: Flick that switch, change that bulb, turn that dial. And write Gov. George Pataki and tell him you agree that now is the time to control global warming pollution from power plants.

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