



OPINION



**Tony Broadbent**

Award-winning author, writer, speaker, brand-strategist, and Beatles expert.

**The Burning Question after the California Fires: No Change or All Change?**

"Is it already too late to stop global warming from surpassing the 1.5 °C 'warming limit' specified by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change?"

SevenDNews    7Dnews  7D.news

## The Burning Question after the California Fires: No Change or All Change?

Environment

Tony Broadbent Tue, 12 Nov 2019 12:24 GMT



## The Burning Question after the California Fires: No Change or All Change?

Environment | Tony Broadbent | Tue, 12 Nov 2019

So after 30 years of indifference and/or disbelief and/or outright denial to the fact greenhouse-gas emissions have caused a rise in the planet's surface temperature, California has again arrived, kicking, screaming and howling at what the cruel winds of fate have delivered to most all of us who live and work and play, here, in the San Francisco Bay Area.

I say "most all" because there are still umpteen 'climate change' deniers and just as many happy-go-lucky-revellers who still haven't a clue the party's over and who are quite content, indeed, hell bent on continuing to party like it's 1999!

And all too understandable, perhaps, when you consider Bay Area residents are privileged to live in what, for most of the year round, is a stunningly

agreeable temperate climate; all the better to close your eyes and float downstream and hope that tomorrow never comes.

Yet the unavoidable truth is that we can no longer afford to close our eyes to what's happening all around us. Not after three straight years of record-breaking fires. Not now we see the shocking consequences of our collective inaction. Not now we're faced with ever more compelling evidence that weather extremes; heat wave, drought, flood, or hurricane-force wind; are increasingly no longer once in a one, -two or -three decade or, even, in some cases once-in-a-hundred-year events, but annual occurrences.

The National Climate Assessment of 2018; backed by no less than thirteen different federal agencies; traced the harmful effects climate change has already wrought upon every single region of the United States. And made no attempt at all to minimize the likely devastation yet to come. One of its more disturbing assessments: That as heat waves get ever more common, nationwide, fire will become an ever-growing problem.

A prediction made all the more disquieting in light of the report released by a global group of 11,000 scientists on the 5th November that endorsed research compiled from forty years of data on such climate change indicators as: growth of human and animal populations, per capita meat production, global tree cover loss, and fossil fuel consumption. Every one of the scientists in agreement that: "The world is facing a climate emergency".

The report's lead author reiterating in the bluntest of terms: "By emergency we mean that if we do not act or respond to the impacts of climate change by reducing our carbon emissions, reducing our livestock production, reducing our land clearing and fossil fuel consumption, the impacts will likely be more severe than we've experienced to date. And that could mean there are areas on Earth that are not inhabitable by people."

The report, very tellingly, released on the very day satellite data showed that last month was the warmest October on record.

All of which raises the burning question: How on earth to live in an ecosystem that's primed and ready to burn?

The all too sobering realization that even though, arguably, California is the state that's done the most to battle the climate crisis, it hasn't saved it from a plague of deadly fires so ferocious and all-consuming that tens of thousands of people have lost their homes; a whole sub-division of 2,800 homes burned and erased from the map in one single event and an entire town of 14,000 homes in another. The names given to each of the fires as seared into collective memory, now, as once were the battles between the states in the American Civil War.

Which then begs the question: Is it already too late to stop global warming from surpassing the 1.5 °C 'warming limit' specified by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change? Especially, with the growing mountain of data that seems to suggest it's already too late, the red line has already been crossed, and that our climate future has already arrived.

For, if nothing else, the extreme weather events in California and across the rest of the country and all around the world tell us that we're already living with the consequences of climate change. Today. Not some thirty or forty or fifty years in the future as was first predicted.

97% of the world's climate scientists see greenhouse gas emissions to be the main driver of global warming. Given which there can be little or no doubt the climate crisis will keep getting worse if nothing is done to reduce our wholesale reliance on fossil fuels.

Doing nothing is not an option, nor should it ever be considered as any sort of viable policy. And outright denial is both delusional and very dangerous. If greenhouse gas emissions are allowed to increase, willy-nilly, there's no telling when the planet might reach some as yet unforeseen tipping point. Or how quickly the world's climate could spiral out of control. For as the planet goes, so goes us, and everything else along with it.

Yet, regardless, we all have to believe the climate crisis is still, somehow, manageable, even solvable. And that governments, corporations, institutions, individuals (not just technological geniuses, like Elon Musk, but

every Tom, Dick, and Harriet); all working together; can produce change, at scale, and truly make a substantive difference.

And so if we do choose to do something, then it has to be on a global scale. Or what on earth's the point. And, yes, of course, that should include the United States. The US walking away from the Paris Climate Agreement is foolhardy in the extreme. But is hopefully, a decision that will be reversed at the very earliest opportunity. The Trump Administration's woefully reckless action mitigated in part by the US Climate Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of twenty-five states committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, wholly, in keeping with the goals of the Paris Agreement; California, chief amongst them. Each and every state governor committed to demonstrate "that climate action is a driver of innovation and economic strength." An alliance that equates to 55% of the US population and an economy worth \$11.7 trillion that, if taken separately, would represent the world's third largest economy after the United States and China.

The conundrum for us all: how on earth do we mitigate and move away from our continued usage of fossil fuels, given that much of what we think of as modern civilization is based upon the burning of carbon-based, CO<sub>2</sub> producing coal, oil, and gas. Without coal there would have been no Industrial Revolution and all the multitude of benefits it produced.

There would have been no silicon-based Digital Revolution and none of the myriad products and services we've all come to rely on. Without many of which much of our modern world would simply and swiftly grind to a halt.

Even the recent week-long, state wide "public safety power shut-offs" by California's largest utility company, PG&E, meant to help mitigate the damage of uncontrolled wildfires; with the attendant total loss of mobile service in many areas; was enough to bring the Bay Area to its knees.

But as we are all now busy getting back onto our feet, it's high time we all at last come to terms with climate breakdown and stop praying that it will simply go away if we ignore it. High time we all get up off our knees and get to grips with climate change and very seriously so.

Truth be told, we now have no other choice but to start cutting carbon emissions and reduce our carbon footprint in any and every way we can. And to do so as aggressively as is humanly possible. Because if we don't, today's massive wildfires and colossal floods will seem as nothing.

As Greta Thunberg, the truly amazing young Swedish schoolgirl, who has inspired a global climate activist movement, said earlier this year at the European Economic and Social Committee, in Brussels: "We need to focus every inch of our being on climate change, because if we fail to do so, then all our achievements and progress have been for nothing and all that will remain of our political leaders' legacy will be the greatest failure of human history. And they will be remembered as the greatest villains of all time, because they have chosen not to listen and not to act."

Reason enough, surely, for us to act. Now. And do whatever it is we can. Now. And be the change we want to see in the world. Now. And vote for state governors and national political leaders who will do everything possible to help save the planet from burning up any further.

For the all too inconvenient truth is we've not so much arrived at the end of the 'Anthropocene', as many of the world's climate scientists now refer to "The Age of Mankind", but more than ever now ventured into the 'Pyrocene' — "The Age Of Fire".

**Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of 7Dnews.**

US & Canada