

## The Coronavirus Doesn't Stop Climate Change

By Greg Dennis, CEAC Board

While the world remains under threat from the coronavirus and COVID-19, one tiny piece of silver lining has been the reduction in carbon emissions. According to a recent report by Shannon Osaka on the always excellent Grist.org, the world may be looking at a 5.5% reduction in carbon pollution this year.

It's just supposition at this point, but Vermont — where transportation is normally responsible for over 43% of our carbon emissions — may see an even greater reduction than 5.5% this year.



But the latest U.N. assessment is that we need to cut carbon emissions by 7.6% per year — for some years to come — if we are to avoid the tipping point that will lead us to experience the worst of climate change.

So with the worldwide economy virtually shut down for now, where are all the emissions coming from?

Osaka points out that people still light, heat and cool their residences and remaining workplaces. That electrical use alone accounts for about 40% of global emissions. While Vermont's electricity is relatively green from a carbon emissions standpoint, electricity in many parts of the world is generated by coal, oil and the almost equally polluting use of gas (especially when fracking and methane emissions are considered).

"With the spread of the virus, there's been a shift from offices to homes, but the power hasn't been turned off, and that power is still being generated largely by fossil fuels," says Gavin Schmidt, a climatologist and the director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York City. In the United States, 60 percent of electricity generation still comes from coal, oil, and natural gas.

But what about all those pictures of cleaner air in Los Angeles and clearer water in Venice, Italy? Don't they indicate we are in better shape regarding climate?

Not really, it turns out. The air and water may be temporarily cleaner — but carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions continue.

The key point here is that individual, personal choices to live a greener lifestyle are helpful, but they are not enough. What's needed are larger system changes to effect the kind of ongoing reduction in emissions that will have to occur, long after the world has solved Covid-19.

"I think people should bike instead of driving, and they should take the train instead of flying," said Schmidt. "But those are small, compared to the really big structural things that haven't changed."

For more information on Addison County's emissions, see the summary by Richard Hopkins in the previous CEAC newsletter: <https://ceacac.org/climate-goals-data/>. For the full Grist article see: <https://bit.ly/2WAecmK>.