

SPEAKERS CORNER



A previous environmental march through Bristol - a march as part of a global day of action takes place tomorrow

Leon Neal

Work together to be part of solution



College Green will once again be the focus of a huge climate change march tomorrow as thousands descend on Bristol as part of a Global Day of Action for COP26.

Angela Terry, environmental scientist and founder of climate action website One Home, explains why personal action is fundamental to achieving global climate goals.

CONCERN about the climate is pretty much universal. An Ipsos MORI survey carried out in August found that 85 per cent of people are worried about climate change. And it's not just young people; the level of concern is similar across all ages.

But translating concern into action is quite another matter. I often hear people say that it's up to Government to sort this out; the problem is too big for us to tackle as individuals. While it is of course true that Government needs to take a lead and deliver policy change that will enable societal change, the importance of individual action has never been greater. It is the combination of the two - top down and bottom up - that are absolutely essential if we are, as a global community, going to achieve the monumental cuts in carbon pollution that are so urgently needed. One cannot happen without the other. In fact, it is personal action, when adopted on a wide scale that drives Government decision making. Similarly, if consumers start buying greener products and services then businesses will react quicker and invest in cleaning up their own act.

Of course, how our actions impact on the climate depends a

great deal on how much money we have. If you earn over £30,000 a year, you may not feel wealthy but you have more power than you think to avert the climate crisis. That's because this group makes up the top 10 per cent of income globally and is responsible for half of the carbon pollution emitted by households. The majority of this comes from frequent and long distance travel by plane and car, as well as energy use in the home. That's why taking personal action in these specific areas have the most impact.

There is hope. The UK has cut its carbon emissions by more than two-fifths since 1990 but most of this reduction has been in the power sector so it's not been part of our day-to-day lives. Much of the action that needs to happen now involves individual behaviour change, such as insulating our homes, eating less meat, and adopting new technology, such as swapping boilers for heat pumps.

But of course the shift must be done fairly, which is where Government investment comes in. Communications must be better too so that people understand what the options are and how the benefits of low carbon living are undoubtedly

positive. We shouldn't think of carbon cutting as impinging on our quality of life - in fact it's quite the opposite. For example, making a small investment in insulation leads to a warmer and cosier home. Eating less red meat and more plant-based food is healthier for us. And both these actions will save us money. Another important low-cost action is to consider your pension and savings and ensure your investments are supporting climate stability rather than fossil fuel companies.

In many cases, the steps we take don't have to cost money. One of the most important things we can do is influence political change and we can do this by contacting our MP and taking part in events like the one happening in Bristol tomorrow. While the Government still continue to support carbon intensive policies, such as the decision last month to cut tax on domestic flights, we must keep up the pressure.

We also shouldn't underestimate the power of the conversations we have with those around us. Our actions and words influence our family and friends and help make climate-friendly decisions the norm. Rather than posting on

social media about far flung holidays and gas guzzling cars, re-focus the content on the simpler pleasures in life.

There is another big advantage to taking personal action - and that is the positive impact it has on our mental health and sense of wellbeing. It is far more empowering to be part of the solution than the problem. Working together as a family, a group of friends or in the wider community helps us feel part of this most urgent shared endeavour.

So if you are in two minds about going along tomorrow, take this opportunity to join this Day of Action. You don't need banners or saucepan lids, just come armed with a rain coat, thermos flask and in full voice. By raising our voices and cutting our carbon footprint, we make it impossible for Government and businesses to ignore the decisive action that must happen immediately.

For more information on how to cut carbon from your lifestyle, go to www.onehome.org.uk

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