

The Sensible Environmentalist

(NAPS)—Dear Dr. Moore:

What can I do to help address the problem of climate change?

The most important thing is to reduce fossil fuel consumption.

When fossil fuels—including coal, oil and natural gas—are burned for energy, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are released into the environment. These emissions are thought to be the leading cause of human-induced climate change. However, industrial society relies to an enormous degree on fossil fuels and reducing their consumption is a major challenge.

As individuals, we can contribute by reducing our energy consumption and, where possible, using renewable energy and materials.

In some parts of the country, consumers can choose to buy “green” energy produced by wind, hydro and biomass (usually wood waste). One of the most environmentally friendly technologies is the ground source heat pump, which uses renewable earth energy from beneath the home to provide hot water, heat and air conditioning. Heat pumps can be specified for new homes and many existing homes can be retrofit.

In terms of materials, all resource use has an environmental impact—but some have a much greater impact than others. Wood is a renewable material produced with natural solar energy, compared with steel, cement and plastics, which are non-renewable and require the consumption of fossil fuels to produce. Where it makes sense, like in construction, substituting or continuing to use

wood in place of these other materials can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Lessening our dependence on fossil fuels will be a gradual process. In the meantime, forests also have a major role to play in reducing greenhouse gases—and societies should be doing what they can to maximize these benefits.

Put simply, trees grow by taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and converting it into sugars, which are then used to build the wood. When a tree decays or burns, the carbon contained in the wood is released back into the environment and the cycle is complete.

Although trees continue to store carbon dioxide for as long as they’re growing, scientists agree that it isn’t possible to completely offset human fossil fuel consumption by planting more trees. On the other hand, deforestation is responsible for about 20 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. This is occurring primarily in the tropics where forests are permanently cleared for agriculture or urban settlement. By reforesting some of the areas cleared for farming, we could add a significant amount of new carbon storage—enough to have a positive impact on climate change.

To become part of the climate change solution, I believe that a sensible environmentalist would reduce energy consumption, use renewable energy and materials, and support policies and practices that lead to forest abundance.

• *Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder and former president of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.*



Dr. Moore