

UE 160918 UG 160919

Statement

As a PSE customer for over 40 years and a member of the Climate and Health Task Force of Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, thank you for hearing my concerns.

It is a scientific fact that greenhouse gasses (GHG) are warming the Earth. As we all well know, this warming can have profound effects on our environment including, ocean acidification, heat waves, sea shore erosion, flooding, crop failures, climate refugees and the list goes on. I am focusing today on climate change and our forests. I grew up in Seattle, have lived in the Puget Sound area virtually my entire life and am witness to our smokier summers. This past summer was a sorry demonstration of the effects of global warming right in our own neighborhoods. The smoke came from British Columbia and Eastern Washington and also inundated favorite outdoor haunts near Lake Wenatchee.

Global warming has extended the forest fire season and the impact of the extended fire season is more than it appears. Whereas with global warming the fire season extends linearly, due to the increased drying of fuels, the size and intensity of the associated fires increases exponentially. Current models suggest that without changes in GHG emissions, forest fire activity will increase four fold in the decades to come. To mitigate the extension of the fire season demands the reduction of fossil fuel emissions.

It should be no surprise that what is bad for the forests is also bad for humans. The particulates in smoky air aggravate asthma, COPD, chronic bronchitis and other forms of chronic lung disease. The smoke also puts stress on precarious cardiovascular systems inducing heart attacks. The oppressive atmosphere and physical irritation of smoky air upsets borderline compensated psychological and psychiatric conditions. To verify the immediate health effects that result from forest fire smoke, one only has to examine emergency room logs. More chronic exposure to particulates is associated with coronary artery disease and a recent publication in the respected New England Journal of Medicine reported that wood smoke even carries some of the same cancer causing chemicals as cigarette smoke.

That Washington State does not need to decrease GHG because of our abundant hydro power is a hollow argument. Just as Canada and the United States share forest fire smoke, GHG know no borders. Global warming is, after all, global. To think otherwise leads to a dangerous game of chicken that no one wins. The sum of all the decisions made by regulating bodies such as yours is what will make the difference in protecting our future. I urge you to call for PSE to transition to all renewable energy for electricity production as soon as possible. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Gerald A. Cufley, M.D

Member Climate and Health Task Force

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