

Concerted efforts vital to combating climate change

It's frustrating, even sad, when you can predict the impacts of climate change with crystal clarity, and yet no one seems to be listening.

One of the world's leading scientists in climate change says we need to focus on solutions and that means political will to effect change.

Global warming is not a catch-phrase and while it may not be currently in vogue, it's as real as rising temperatures and water levels, and the waist-deep flood waters seen recently in Toronto and Calgary.

According to King Township's Hans Martin, who once gathered the world's brightest minds to study acid rain and climate change, he's frustrated at government inaction.

Turning a blind eye to the erosion of nature with mankind's current lust for money and power will be our undoing, Martin pointed out. In recent years, there's been a noticeable 'dumbing down' of what the public and governments can do to slow climate change. 'It seems we've given it all up for hamburgers, football and air conditioning,' Martin remarked.

It's not hard to be environmentally friendly and it's almost as easy as falling out of bed in the morning.

Over his distinguished career, Martin has done his best to increase knowledge, awareness and government action on the issue. Now, it's up to our leadership to take the bull by the horns.

Unfortunately, it's not happening. Even worse, Canada's commitment to Kyoto and climate change initiatives has actually fallen by the wayside.

Who's at fault?

'Who's leading?' Martin asks rhetorically. 'If Canada doesn't put its foot down on climate change we're in big trouble.'

Both federal and provincial governments have to become more engaged in the issue and that boils down to leadership. Aside from the will, we need to ramp up our education on environmental issues, and encourage informative TV programming over reality shows.

Our society simply doesn't nurture children's innate curiosity and thirst for knowledge. The next generation of thinkers and doers may be equipped, but we simply can't wait another decade or two.

In the last five years, Canada has 'quietly withdrawn' from the scene, stepping out of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

He and his colleagues made such far-reaching contributions that it 'sickens' him that our government has shrugged its responsibilities. 'During Martin's tenure with the federal government, Canada was a world leader on acid rain and climate change.'

Martin was there when former prime minister Brian Mulroney met with former president Ronald Reagan on acid rain. 'It was the most exciting time of my life,' he said. He and his staff worked day and night on the issue, briefing ministers, creating documents and producing results.

Their research even persuaded industry leaders to take up the cause. He recalls when Inco, Canada's huge nickel producer, rebuilt its Sudbury plant to reduce emissions. That put the company ahead of the game and even gained accolades for their technology.

In the late 1980s, Martin recalls meeting with 60 of the world's best scientists to discuss climate change for the first time. While skeptical at first, he soon learned just how serious the situation was.

As computer technology improved, scientists created atmospheric models and crammed them full of as much data as possible. These proved quite useful in predicting climate change impacts in the years to come.

Martin helped pen the very first report on climate change in 1988 ? ?The Changing Atmosphere.?

As scientific investigation grew through the 1990s, more and more information came to light.

Martin helped monitor greenhouse gas emissions from methane in the Arctic, which revealed the cycle of global warming. As the permafrost begins to melt, it accelerates methane production, which leads to a rise in temperature.

Martin spent from 1995-'98 working as a Canadian scientific attache at the Canadian embassy in Bonn, Germany, keeping diplomats up to speed on environmental issues.

Trained in atmospheric physics, Martin began his career studying micro-meteorology, learning how the atmosphere works, scanning every square inch of it. After a stint in Australia with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Martin began working for Environment Canada in Toronto.

By the late 1970s, he wanted to do more and make more of a contribution. That's when acid rain piqued his interest and he led the assessment of the situation in Canada and the U.S., publishing many documents and leading meetings here and with the United Nations in Geneva on the topic.

One could definitely write a book on Martin's career and contributions. He's published countless volumes on the subjects. He's still quite passionate about it all, becoming excited as he relays information and stresses the dire circumstances.

Making climate change more topical today are those floods, unprecedented storms and weather-related anomalies ? all telltale signs of a change for the worse. Remember the unseasonably mild winter of 2011/2012?

?There's a pattern,??Martin said.

All of these things were predicted, accurately and in detail, roughly a decade ago.

Martin sees the effects of climate change in his own back yard.

He's been an avid beekeeper for decades and the health of honey bees is indicative of the health of the planet. Their numbers are dropping and ?that's significant.? His background and knowledge garnered him an invitation to become the scientific advisor for the Ontario?Beekeepers'?Association.

The matter of changing weather patterns will resurface when the insurance industry hammers home the point of increased claims due to weather damage. Flooding is the number one reason for insurance claims in Canada.

While global economies have hindered progress on the environmental front, that's no excuse to abandon climate change.

Are we past the point of no return, or can we make a difference??Martin isn't sure. We may not know for another five or 10 years. But by then, it may be too late.

Nature is so powerful and so very patient.

We simply can't afford to push our ecosystem to the max.

Frustration continues to build for Hans Martin. He finds a certain amount of solace in his bee colonies and his watercolour painting.

He will never give up on either. And he will likely continue to sound the alarm bells on climate change.

By Mark Pavilons