

The bad news is about climate change (no surprise). The more we learn, the more daunting the problem appears. Cases in point:

- A [column in the journal *Nature*](#) (subscription required) provided the short version of [a report issued this past spring](#) by the California Council on Science and Technology on what it will take for California to achieve the 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels mandated by AB 32 and Executive Order S-3-05. The bottom line? Current technologies won't get us there. "[A] concerted effort to deploy known technology could cut emissions by more than half, but getting all the way down to 80% cuts will almost certainly require major advances in near-zero-emissions fuels."
- To make things worse, [the Washington Post reported](#) that global CO2 emissions jumped 6% last year, the largest increase on record. Emissions are outpacing the most pessimistic scenario considered in the IPCC's 2007 report.
- Meanwhile, a team of researchers at NRDC and UCSF (joined by Berkeley Law student Linda Geballe) have tried to get a handle on the likely scope of future health costs from climate change by [estimating the costs of "six climate change-related events"](#) (subscription required, Scientific American has a [freely available description](#) of the study and results) that struck the United States between 2000 and 2009," all "from categories of climate change-related events projected to worsen with continued global warming." The methodology obviously has some limits, but even taken as very rough estimates the numbers are attention-getting: direct health care costs of \$740 million, and more than \$14 billion in total health costs using EPA's figures for the value of a premature death.

So what's the good news? Experience shows that when we tackle environmental problems head-on, we can accomplish more than we think we can. A few recent reminders:

- The Contra Costa Times had [this look back](#) at the beginnings of the organization now known as [Save the Bay](#) in 1961. Three Berkeley housewives concerned about losing their Bay view catalyzed a novel regional planning effort that has gone far beyond reducing the pace of Bay filling to address pollution, marshlands restoration, and increased public access.
- Peter Lehner, at NRDC's Switchboard blog, [tells the story](#) of conquering the supposedly "impossible" problem of lead in gasoline, first in the U.S. and then worldwide. Despite dire predictions of economic disaster, Lehner notes, "The United States ended up saving \$10 for every \$1 spent on removing lead from gasoline, due to reduced health costs, savings on engine maintenance, and better fuel efficiency."
- And on the greenhouse gas emissions front, the [same Washington Post story](#) that reported the massive recent spike in emissions also had some positive news to report:

the developed nations that ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 (a group from which the US is conspicuously absent) have achieved the goal they set then of cutting emissions 8% from 1990 levels.

So maybe the take-away lesson is this: yes, the problems we face are tough, but we've learned that we can make serious inroads on problems that seem intractable. Time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.