

Why This Manual?



This is a guide to actions that we in Rhode Island, in our households and communities, can take to reduce the state's contributions to climate change. It's also a guide to building relationships—with each other and with the natural world—that will create a larger cultural and political shift away from a fossil fuel economy, toward a more livable future.

Our climate has changed, and will change more, in ways that can render us homeless or kill us. In just this last year, we've seen the devastation that hurricanes like Harvey, Irma and Maria can bring to coastal communities—hurricanes like these will become more frequent as the climate warms. The effects of climate change can starve us and suffocate us as they disrupt the ways we get our food, our water and even our air. Our actions in the next few years will determine how severe those changes are, and how we survive them.

As of today, 80% of the greenhouse (climate-warming) gas emissions we generate in RI come from a combination of transportation (40%), electrical generation (20%), and residential use (19%)—mostly heating and cooling. We're also responsible for the greenhouse gases produced in transporting and making many of the things we use, even when those things are made outside Rhode Island.

The way we live generates these climate-changing gases, and so this manual is a guide to changing the way we live. To keep Rhode Island livable, we need to get our emissions as close to zero as possible and improve our relationships with the ecosystem we're part of—which includes each other. We need to act together, and we need to act now.

This manual shows how we can work together to make these changes. You can choose

the ones that work for you and encourage your neighbors to do the same.

To stop our greenhouse gas emissions, we must:

1. Drive less, and invest in and use cleaner, more social and communal transportation: walking, biking, ridesharing, public transit.
2. Reduce the amount of electricity we use overall.
3. At the same time, convert our vehicles and heating systems to ones that can be powered with electricity, rather than fossil fuels. Electricity can be generated renewably, with much lower fossil fuel emissions.
4. Generate more, and eventually all, of our electricity using renewable resources like solar and wind.
5. Change how we eat, travel, and use our land, and other aspects of the way we live, to require less fossil fuel use, enrich our economy, and strengthen our communities.

Making these changes will require work and ingenuity. Fortunately, Rhode Islanders are good at that. You and the people you live with, work with, learn with, or worship with will find many things you can do, on a scale that you can afford, that will make Rhode Island more livable now and for future generations.

Our Rhode Island: Our Challenge



Our Rhode Island—the one we know today—is set up to depend on fossil fuels. Where

we live, work, shop and learn—our suburbs and subdivisions, shopping plazas and malls, corporate and college campuses—require most of us to drive. Our economy, which leans on consumer spending now that we don't have as much industry as we once did, requires us to ship products in by road, water or air. Many of us have to do work that contributes further to the state's fossil fuel impact and the strain on its natural environment, and is hard on our bodies and minds.

Rhode Island is also a place of land preservation and open spaces, protected barrier beaches, and historic preservation. Many Rhode Islanders have worked together, and worked hard, for many years to improve the water quality in Narragansett Bay, to protect and tend wild land and prevent or undo environmental damage, and to preserve historic buildings and structures: we have a strong concern for heritage and history. Many of us are also working at the state and local level to reduce fossil fuel emissions, strengthen our communities and ecosystems and provide for our quality of life.

The way we've been living for the past few generations is forcing us into a future where the way we live will need to change. We will either transform it on purpose and with care to create a future that we can live with, or global warming and climate change will transform it for us and for all the living creatures of the future—in ways that will make it hard or impossible for any of us to live. If you want to know more about the way climate change works and how it affects us, see the "Basic Climate Facts" section.

This choice is a moral choice as well as a practical one. What do we owe to ourselves and each other in the present? What are our obligations to other people in the world and to future generations? Which of the things that we do now are essential to our lives, and which can we change in ways that will improve our lives?

Fortunately, we have programs and opportunities that enable us to make changes in the way we live. Rhode Island has become a leader in both energy efficiency programs and clean energy development, and there are many more opportunities to reduce our emissions and stabilize our economy. Rhode Island's political leaders have reaffirmed Rhode Island's commitment to the Paris Agreement on climate change, an international effort to keep global warming below catastrophically destructive limits.

But this agreement doesn't commit the state to specific strategies or bind us to reduce our own emissions by any particular amount. That means it's even more important for us to work at all levels, state and local government, community and household efforts, to keep our commitment and reduce our contributions to global warming.

Since our "business as usual" is set up to depend on the fossil fuels that will make our present way of life impossible in any case, we need to change the way we do business and what we usually do. This may mean leaving some aspects of our present lives behind, and we may miss them. Some of the changes may feel strange to us at first, but as we commit to them, they will help us make a livable Rhode Island for the future.

How to Use This Manual



Using this manual is straightforward and easy. You don't have to go through it in sequence, and you don't have to read all of it to make a difference in your life—and in the lives of those in your community who are already feeling the impacts of climate change.

The manual is organized by topic. Each topic has lists of suggestions for working as members of a household and members of a community. The actions with the most impact are explained in more detail. Each page also shows some of the benefits of these actions, and some of them list state agencies and advocacy groups who do work related to making these changes. We're more effective if we work together, so the manual emphasizes interaction and relationships to achieve a livable Rhode Island.

Here's how to start:

1. Choose a topic—maybe one you’ve been wondering about, or one where making a change seems particularly challenging. We recommend you look at the manual with family, friends, colleagues—again, many of these actions are group actions and need collective or collaborative effort.
2. See if you already do any of the recommended actions. If so, well done—so far!
3. Evaluate the actions you don’t yet participate in. Which of them seem like they’re within your power this week? What about within the next three months? Or for the end of the year?
4. Research the action (if you need to) and put it into practice. The “Overview” pages in this manual give some context for the specific actions in this manual, and the “Further Resources” linked on the manual website can help you with your research.
5. Talk about it! You may find other people in your groups, or people beyond your groups, who already do it and can share tips and experiences, or interest someone new in trying it. Lend the manual to a neighbor, share the link on Facebook, or print out individual pages for people who might be interested.
6. If it’s an ongoing action or practice, keep it up- and look for the next thing on the list that you can do.