

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.