

Seniors Going Green: Resilient Practices for Your Communities

Leading Age OR, May 2022; From Six Oregon Green Teams

“Invest In Our Planet,” the theme of Earth Day 2022, calls on governments, institutions, businesses, the technology sector and individual citizens to recognize our collective responsibility to help accelerate solutions to combat our greatest threat, climate change. We believe that managers of senior living facilities, who work to help people thrive in their older years, must play an important leadership role in addressing climate change. We urge the following actions:

- **Create a climate resilience plan** (as distinct from earthquake resilience) if you do not already have one. Climate resilience is “the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate.”
- **Assess your facility’s carbon footprint.** Engage consultants to complete an energy audit of your facility if not already done. Such an audit can be used as a baseline for short- and long-range goal setting.
- **Work with your Board to create an environmental policy** evaluating impacts as well as costs for projects. Experts agree that preventive climate resilience measures will be very expensive, but that reactive measures will be far more costly. Seek grants/partner organizations that could provide funding to overcome cost barriers.
- **Work with your Boards to divest from fossil fuels** and invest in clean, renewable energy.
- **Use your commitment to climate resilience in the hiring of staff** in your institutions. Dedicated staff are needed to maintain forward movement.
- **Support resident education and collaborate with action groups** such as resident Green Teams.
- **Advocate for a Leading Age platform that could support and broaden collaborative efforts by CCRCs** across Oregon to build climate resiliency.

We close with an appeal for managers and residents to work together creating new ways of doing business, ways that create climate resiliency that addresses planetary tipping points.

CLIMATE JARGON SIMPLIFIED: Loosely drawn from the NYT Climate Desk, October 31, 2021.

RESILIENCE: The ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate.

NET ZERO: Ideally the point at which we are no longer pumping any additional greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Practically, many countries' net zero pledges are vague and not yet backed by concrete policies to curb emissions.

SUSTAINABILITY: The United Nations defines sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The problem is we fail to take into consideration that we have currently overshoot the planet's ability to sustain us. Our current lifestyles are not sustainable.

ADAPTATION: This refers to steps aimed at blunting the current consequences of climate change, and preparing for what happens, as they get worse. Examples include changing how and where we build houses and roads, helping people move away from places vulnerable to flooding or wildfires, or planting different kinds of crops as weather patterns change.

MITIGATION: This refers to anything that reduces emissions of planet-warming gases, i.e., a shift from coal-fired electricity generation to wind and solar, from gas powered cars to electric, or toward more energy efficient appliances. Without significant progress on mitigation, and quickly, the planet faces catastrophe.

CARBON FOOTPRINT: The tally of emissions related to everything else in your life — heating your home, driving to and from work, even the pet food your cat or dog eats — is your household's carbon footprint or its contribution to global warming.

NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS: The use of nature to help solve climate-related problems. For example, peat lands, sea grass meadows and forests act as carbon sinks, in urban areas trees cool people during heat waves. Nature-based solutions can both help fight climate change and guard against its consequences, while also nurturing the world's biodiversity. They are a critical tool.

GEO-ENGINEERING/CLIMATE INTERVENTION: Deliberately intervening in the composition of the atmosphere. Such schemes are wildly controversial. Even if they worked, [nobody is sure](#) what the effect would be on different parts of the world.

CLEAN ENERGY: Not to be confused with renewable energy, clean energy refers to any source that doesn't add significant greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, in contrast to fossil fuels.