

Press Release from Western Michigan University Climate Change Working Group
Climate Change Warning Much More Urgent, but still Not Urgent Enough
for immediate release

We can no longer postpone action on climate change into the future; to prevent the worst effects of climate change, massive efforts must begin now.

With its October 6 “Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse emission pathways,” the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has issued a clarion call to unprecedented global action. “We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN” *The Guardian* headline says. “Major Climate Report Describes a Strong Risk of Crisis as Early as 2040” says *The New York Times*. Indeed, as it lays out greater harms coming sooner and more specifics on critical policy changes, of all IPCC reports this is the most urgent.

But the report is not urgent enough.

1) Atmospheric Carbon dioxide is increasing to extraordinary levels. Over the previous 2 million years, atmospheric carbon dioxide never exceeded 300 ppm. [1][1] *Today it is 405 ppm, and rising fast.* The greater the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide, the greater the effects on global warming. In the distant past when the Earth had 405 ppm atmospheric carbon dioxide, the conditions on the planet were so inhospitable that *human survival would have been difficult if not impossible.*

2) *We are likely to reach a global temperature rise of 1.5°C much sooner than 2040.* 2014 was the hottest year in human history, and yet all but one year since has been even hotter. Currently, the planet is about 1 degree warmer than during the pre-industrial period. With climate change accelerating and temperature in 2 of the last 5 years increasing more than 0.1° C each year it is entirely reasonable and conservative to say that *we are likely to exceed 1.5°C even in the next decade.* In fact, in the month of February 2016, the global average temperature exceeded the 1.5 degree benchmark.

3) Politicians, not just scientists, influence the final IPCC reports. It is likely that politicians temper the IPCC predictions and recommendations. And scientific standards are conservative even before political interference. The IPCC has a track record of being highly conservative, and *this report, even its urgency, is still too moderate.*

The enormous economic investment that the IPCC recommends is *even more urgent than they claim.* The extreme droughts and floods, fires and hurricanes, poverty and starvation, and extensive species loss that the IPCC has predicted for decades is already upon us and is picking up speed. A continued policy of inaction puts hundreds of millions of lives in jeopardy. The IPCC report indicates that to keep the global temperature increase below 1.5 degrees to avoid the most threatening outcomes of climate change, we need to cut carbon emissions 45% within 12 years and reach zero emissions by 2050. The enormous economic investment and unprecedented global cooperation that the IPCC calls for to accomplish this *may not be enough.* Greater effort is needed and we must act now.

Critical worldwide action needs American leadership. Mobilization on the scale of World War II must begin to redesign energy infrastructure and to reduce carbon pollution in all ways possible.

The Western Michigan University Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) consists of over 100 members including leaders of local climate-related groups, community members, local government officials, Kalamazoo College faculty, WMU students, faculty and staff from several Colleges, representatives from the Office for Sustainability, and from the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society. The active ‘core’ group of 20 WMU faculty represent the humanities, social and physical sciences, all of whom teach and research on topics related to climate change. The CCWG fosters research, teaching, and public engagement.

For more information or to organize a public event, do not hesitate to contact:

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