

Rationing could be key to war on climate change

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Governments may be forced to turn to wartime-style rationing to combat climate change, or risk mass migration and more than 40 million deaths, an expert in global warming has warned.

John Grant, a lecturer in sustainable development from Sheffield Hallam University, believes that governments across the globe should consider rationing carbon to help cut down on carbon and methane emissions, which are produced from burning plants and fossil fuels, and are contributing to increasingly severe weather conditions.

Britain is in the grip of its hottest July since records began in 1659, while five of the hottest years recorded have come in the last ten years.

"We have to tackle climate change as if we're going to war. Global warming is a common enemy for us all and it's a case of having to pull together. Fuel, gas and food were all successfully rationed during World War II and a similar strategy could be effectively used now with carbon. A carbon card system, whereby individuals would be given a carbon allocation and pay high prices for any extra on the market, would work. Buying petrol for example would have a high carbon rating, whereas for locally grown apples, it would be very low. Identity cards could be an ideal vehicle for such a scheme", John Grant said.

"The permafrost peat bog in Western Siberia is already melting, and if it continues to do so, it will release 11,000 years' worth - billion of tonnes - of carbon into the earth's atmosphere, trapping the heat in like a blanket.

"The next 100 years will be a tipping point. By 2050, we could have an intensely hot summer like 2003, where 35,000 people died across Europe, every other year. If we don't do anything about global warming in the next twenty years, it's likely that by 2100, the temperature across the planet will have risen by two to five degrees Celsius. We could cope with that here in the UK, with all our money and resources, but that small rise would make living in the Sahara basin or around North Africa for example, unbearable.

"We could be looking at 100 million people moving north to escape the heat, and around 40 million deaths."

He warned that glacial melting and the slowing down of the Gulf Stream current could also spell global disaster.

"Research over the last 12 years has shown a drop in the speed of the Gulf Stream by 30 per cent, because the Arctic Ice shelf and the Greenland glaciers are melting at an unprecedented speed, and the fresh water is reducing the current's density. The Gulf Stream current acts like a central heating system, helping make temperatures around the world more stable and temperate. Without it, here in the UK, we could have icebergs off the coast of Scarborough and winter temperatures could plunge to -35 degrees Celsius.

"Glacial melting will spell disaster for the UK, but the Himalayan glaciers that feed the great Asian rivers like the Ganges and the Yangtze are also likely to disappear within forty years. If these rivers dry up during the irrigation season, then the rice production, which currently feeds more than one third of humanity, collapses and the world goes into net food deficit."

Mr Grant urged the UK Government to make renewable energy such as solar power, easier for people to use.

"Solar panels should be subsidised like coal is. Nuclear power is a bit of a red herring because it produces lots of carbon dioxide. We need to see more action and less talk from the Government, especially where sustainable housing is concerned. By 2025, we will supposedly have carbon neutral, energy self-sufficient houses, but work on this needs to start now."

He added that people could make small lifestyle changes to help the planet.

"We're driven by conspicuous consumption and decadence is seen as a sign of personal success, so our perceptions of the importance of global warming need to change. No one piece of technology will save our bacon; we need to make lifestyle changes. Choosing low energy light bulbs, walking or cycling to work and turning down the thermostat at home can all make a difference, as can turning electrical items off rather than leaving them on standby."

"I fear it will take a climatic catastrophe to compel governments across the globe to take action, but the human race has shown repeatedly that it can reverse the damage.

Parts of Western Europe were rebuilt after World War II in less than ten years for example, and a ban on CFCs was achieved after it was revealed they were damaging the ozone layer, so I'm optimistic we can make the changes. Giving up is not an option."

Source: Sheffield Hallam University

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