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<http://www.vpr.net/episode/33211/>

## **Alan Betts: Climate change**

(VPR HOST) *Early in February the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, released a new report on the "Physical Basis for Climate Change". Commentator Alan Betts says it was a monumental effort.*

(BETTS) It took 600 volunteer scientists five years to analyze all the new research, and reach unanimous agreement. Another 600 scientists then reviewed the report carefully, as well as thousands of industry representatives and critics. Then at a week-long meeting in Paris, it was reviewed by 113 governments (including the United States) and again given unanimous consent.

The report says there's unequivocal evidence that the climate system is warming, as a result of rising greenhouse gas levels, mostly coming from the burning of fossil fuels. All the evidence now fits together: the air and oceans have warmed, snow and ice are melting in many regions, and sea-level is rising. It's warming faster over land and in the Arctic; and heat waves, heavy precipitation and droughts have become more frequent. The past 50 years have been warmer than at any time in the past one thousand. The projections of our models are consistent with what we see happening. For Vermont, this means a mean warming close to 2 degF by the year 2030. We may not have made a conscious choice, but the earth is now committed, simply because we took no action in the past twenty years to reduce our burning of fossil fuels. Much of the added carbon dioxide will not be removed from the atmosphere for another century or so.

The next twenty years of warming is committed, but at least we now know clearly what our choices are. Whatever action we take (or fail to take) in the next twenty years will determine our climate later in this century. Our best estimate for the mean warming of the whole earth from a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide is about 5 degF (and again, more over land and in the north). Only a major effort to make our energy economy more efficient, and shift it from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources will prevent this doubling of carbon dioxide.

For more than a decade, a lot of money has been poured into an effort to confuse the public and postpone the day when the US takes action. This resistance has collapsed in the last few months, because the IPCC report, with its clear scientific evidence, was put on the web in draft form last fall. Finally this Valentines Day, the last hold-out in the oil industry, ExxonMobil, threw in the towel with full page ads in the Wall Street Journal, admitting that climate change was real. Now the dissenters have shifted from protesting the science, to protesting the economic cost of change.

I'm a scientist not an economist, but it's clear to me that the cost of doing nothing will be far higher than the cost of using our technology to intelligently fix a problem that was generated by our technology in the first place. We can't afford to waste any more time. We must begin the search for solutions in earnest. The future of our grandchildren is at stake.