

# The Register-Guard

## Doppelt: Climate change will test human spirit

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By Bob Doppelt

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A WWII-like mass mobilization is required to prevent civilization-altering climate disruption. Success won't, however, prevent more unprecedented disasters and harmful stresses.

The mobilization must therefore place an equal emphasis on preparing and adapting society for the accelerating physical, economic, social and personal shocks and strains generated by rising global temperature.

Climate adaptation efforts have primarily focused on hardening infrastructure and other external physical structures and systems, and adapting natural resources to warming. After many years in the field I concluded these efforts, although important, have significant limitations.

As this week's surprise snowstorm illustrates, it is very difficult to determine with much accuracy the timing, frequency, magnitude, or how combinations of impacts will affect different locations or physical assets.

Most important, there will never be enough money available to relocate or redesign every power or road system or other aspects of society's infrastructure to prevent damage from climate impacts.

A major emphasis must therefore now be placed on preparing *people* for the increasing disasters and toxic stresses resulting from climate disruption.

The wildfires that killed over 80 people and displaced hundreds more on the West Coast last year offer an example. Faced with the injury or death of friends or loved ones, or losing residences, valuables or livelihoods, many will experience mental health problems such as severe anxiety, depression, PTSD or suicidal thoughts that could negatively affect them, their family, and their community for years.

The effects can go even farther. I was running a workshop in San Francisco when the Camp Fire burned the town of Paradise, 170 miles away. The smoke was so thick you could not see across the street, and people were visibly freaked out.

Higher temperatures alone can increase aggression and violence. When more extreme storms, floods, heat waves and droughts become more frequent and are intermixed with ongoing severe stresses, mental health problems and their impact on communities will grow far worse.

A climate mobilization must prepare people for these difficulties. One focus should be on helping everyone think through how different disasters might affect their residences and communities. Emergency backup systems should then be installed.

In addition, people should be helped to build connections with others to ensure good social support.

Another focus should be on building emotional resilience. This involves building two types of skills. “Presencing,” also called self-regulation, skills enable people to calm their mind, body, and emotions when distressed. “Purposing,” also called adversity-based growth, skills help people use hardships as catalysts to find new sources of meaning, direction and hope in life.

The Resilience Network of the Gorge and Southern Oregon Success are examples of state initiatives that have used this approach to build resilience within diverse populations.

The combination of emergency backup systems, enhanced social supports and resilience skills can help people think and act in healthy ways even in unhealthy conditions.

A national climate mobilization must do more than eliminate emissions. It must also prepare people for the significant challenges that lie ahead. Communities throughout Lane County should immediately begin to pursue these strategies.

*Bob Doppelt directs The Resource Innovation Group and writes a monthly column for The Register-Guard on climate change-related issues.*