

# BOB DOPPELT: Global warming — Eugene businesses do their part

By Bob Doppelt

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The bad news: Scientists have discovered that due to human activities, the Earth may become much hotter than was previously thought.

The good news is that a number of local businesses are beginning to do their part to reduce their climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions. If they continue to expand their efforts, and if many other businesses do the same, we just might get a handle on the problem.

Let's start with the bad news.

In late May, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology released what could be considered the most comprehensive modeling yet completed on how much warmer the Earth's climate would get without rapid and dramatic reductions in emissions.

The projections, published in the American Meteorological Society's Journal of Climate, indicate a mean probability of increased surface warming of more than 9 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100, with a 90 percent probability range of between 6 degrees and 13 degrees.

That is scary stuff. Scientists believe that irreversible climate change becomes increasingly likely if temperatures rise more than 3.6 degrees above historic levels, and that it is possible even below those levels.

The good news is that some local businesses are beginning to adopt practices that can cut emissions. Cases in point are Autohaus, Euro-Asian Automotive and Market of Choice in Eugene.

George Rode, president and owner of the two auto repair companies, recently attended a Climate Masters at Work class. The seminar, developed by my program at the University of Oregon, helps companies learn cost-effective ways to reduce their emissions.

Rode always has been committed to environmental stewardship. But after he took the course he told me, "I thought I was doing good until I took your Climate Masters training through the UO. Then I realized there was so much more I could do."

Before attending Climate Masters at Work, Rode's company had become one of just five local firms to be awarded an Eco-Biz certification by the city of Eugene.

That voluntary program helps auto-related companies adopt practices to keep pollutants out of the storm-water system and the airshed, conserve resources by reusing and recycling fluids and solid wastes, and educate employees about good environmental practices.

After the company received the certification, Rode installed solar panels at both businesses. The system provides about one third of the company's annual electrical power. He expects it to pay for itself within four to five years.

A few months ago, Rode installed energy-efficient ductless heat pumps to cool and heat both his office and home. Less energy use means fewer carbon emissions.

But Rode has just begun. "Climate Masters opened my eyes so much about what to do to lower my businesses and personal carbon footprint. The biggest education was to pick the 'low fruit' — that is, the easiest habits to change."

His future plans include, for example, giving his employees cash incentives to drive more fuel-efficient personal vehicles. He also plans to install more energy-efficient lighting and motion detector light switches in the facilities. Another solar photovoltaic system also is in the works.

Most importantly, Rode told me he will "continue to educate people around me to make small changes in their personal habits to lower their carbon footprint."

Market of Choice's efforts to reduce its carbon emissions is not as advanced as Rode's, but it is gearing up for big things. It recently formed a corporate-level sustainability committee, for example, and "green teams" are being organized at each of its seven stores in Eugene and Portland.

According to Michael Scott, the company's new sustainability coordinator, the teams will "educate and empower employees at each location to maximize energy efficiency and reduce waste."

Scott attended our first Climate Masters at Work training program. Like Rode, he decided to be strategic and harvest the “low hanging fruit” first before launching bigger projects.

One of his first efforts was to put large trash bins in the south Eugene store to help employees separate food waste from other waste materials. About 5 tons of green waste monthly is now diverted from the landfill and sent to Rexus for composting. Green waste would decompose and produce methane at the landfill, which on a per-molecule basis is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

To reduce energy consumption, the firm recently piloted the use of light emitting diode lighting in its freezers. It worked. And the company is now updating all of its freezer doors with LED lights. An inventory of the company’s carbon emissions and many other actions are on the to-do list.

The initial emission reductions these firms have pursued won’t prevent runaway global warming. But if they continue to expand, and if many other businesses here and across the nation scale up as well, with the help of effective policies we’ll have a good shot at taming the climate change beast.

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