

# Climate change solutions aren't obvious.

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Often when teaching a class I point out the need for new thinking by telling the tale of a man who frantically searches for his keys under the streetlight in front of his home. A neighbor comes by and asks, "Are you sure you lost the keys here in the street?"

"On no," says the man. "I don't know where I lost them."

"Then why are you looking for them under this lamp post?" asks the neighbor.

"Because the light is better here," he says.

So it is with global warming. We tend to look for solutions where they are easy to see, meaning we focus on what we already know and do well. Many solutions to global warming, however, will likely be found elsewhere.

Last Thursday, local governments, utilities, and academic programs from throughout the Eugene-Springfield area described their efforts to address global warming at the first-ever Climate Summit at the University of Oregon. The list of activities was impressive.

The Springfield School District, for example, is building two new elementary schools to meet the equivalent of green building LEED silver standards. The district's goal is to make the new schools 30 percent more energy efficient than is required by state code. Lane Transit District's new EmX "accordion" buses are actually hybrids that run on biodiesel. Lane County is pursuing energy production and job development from food waste, biofuels and woody biomass. Lane Community College and the UO have adopted green building, recycling and green purchasing policies.

Representatives from the Emerald People's Utility District, the Eugene Water & Electric Board, the Bethel School District, the Lane Council of Governments and the city of Eugene shared other exciting activities. Metro area residents should be pleased with the activities their public agencies are pursuing.

Despite the good work, most of the activities described at the summit are extensions of existing approaches. Take energy efficiency, for example. The Northwest Power and Conservation Council calculates that increased

efficiency has since 1978 saved the region 2,900 average megawatts, more than enough to supply the electrical needs of two cities the size of Seattle. We know that better design and improved technologies are essential cost-effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

One presentation, however, stood out for its new way to think about efficiency. Representatives from the Eugene School District described their efforts to stagger class bell times to improve the efficient use of buses. District representatives also talked about encouraging parents to voluntarily adopt a no-idling policy while waiting in their cars for their kids that is similar to the one they and other school districts already have for their buses.

Rather than relying on technology alone, the school district has made a conceptual leap to understanding that behavioral changes offer entirely new ways to increase efficiency. That's a great example of looking beyond where the light already shines. Extending this thinking to many other types of behavioral changes offers whole new opportunities to improve performance, save money and reduce emissions.

Another presentation that stood out was by Steve Bicker from Northwest Natural. Although the company believes natural gas is a comparatively clean fossil fuel, Bicker said the utility also knows it is a finite resource. In the future the company understands it will need to make the transition to even cleaner renewable fuels. NW Natural appears to have made the conceptual leap to realizing that the company will eventually need to adopt a whole new business model. That's the type of thinking that can solve the climate crisis and keep a company competitive.

One glaring omission at the summit was climate preparation. If more time had been available, people such as Tom Williams from EWEB might have described his utility's efforts to understand the potential impacts of global warming on the McKenzie River. However, no one talked about how they were preparing their operations, natural systems or customers to withstand or adapt to climate change. Lack of preparedness usually comes back to haunt people.

Some of the efforts described during the summit were the result of partnerships between various agencies. Most, however, were the work of the individual organizations. That's OK. Not everything can be done collaboratively. But most local greenhouse gas emissions cannot be reduced by any single organization alone.

A prime example is transportation, which produces 50 percent of the emissions in the metro area. Every local public agency, along with the private sector, must work together to reduce transportation emissions. As a side benefit air quality is likely to improve.

The same can be said about efforts to reduce other sources of emissions, to prepare for climate change, promote climate education, and grow low-carbon businesses. Looking beyond where the light already shines can open the door to exciting new ways to resolve the climate crisis while providing benefits for the community.

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