

DAILY NEWS

Opinion

There's no more denying climate change

New York must face the truth, or else more storms like Sandy will come our way

BY MAURA KELLY / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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The Aftermath of Sandy

NATIONAL GUARD/REUTERS

When terrorists attacked our city more than a decade ago, New Yorkers insisted that politicians do everything in their power to prevent another similar massacre. In the wake of the vicious assault from Sandy, we should similarly be demanding that changes be made, federally and locally, to mitigate another disaster like this — because the likelihood that we'll have one is high.

Why we can expect plenty more killer storms like Sandy and Irene in the years to come? Jeff Masters, director of meteorology at the Weather Underground, has explained: "When you heat the oceans more" — as we've been doing with our consumption of fossil fuels — "you extend the length of hurricane season."

He continues: "There's been ample evidence over the last decade or so that hurricane season is getting longer." That, in turn, makes it more likely for a hurricane to meet up with a wintery low-pressure system — and what happens then? "This ridiculous combination of a nor'easter and hurricane that comes ashore, bringing all kinds of destruction," as Masters put it. Some scientists have acknowledged that climate change is such a complex issue that it's hard to say definitively that it is causing more frequent or more intense hurricanes.

Nonetheless, as Mayor Bloomberg said on Thursday: "[W]hile the increase in extreme weather we have experienced in New York City and around the world may or may not be the result of [global warming], the risk that it might be — given this week's devastation — should compel all elected leaders to take immediate action."

Moreover, what is indisputable is how much sea levels—which play a huge role in how much we'll suffer, come the next one—have increased.

Warming waters have pushed the ocean closer to our doorsteps, causing it to rise ten inches in this area in the last century, according to William Solecki, co-chair of the New York City Panel on Climate Change — launched by Bloomberg in 2008.

Even more terrifying, if we keep using oil and gas at the same rates, the sea could rise four times as fast in the years ahead — adding 4.5 feet to the ocean's height before 2080. And the higher it gets, year after year, the more damage it can inflict on us.

The impact of global warming has become so much more evident in this area in recent years, due not only to the severe weather disasters we've had in the cold months, but also to the unbearable, record-breaking heat we've had summer after summer. (The annual average temperature in New York has increased nearly 2° F in the last thirty years; our winters are almost 5° F warmer.) Despite all this, global warming wasn't so much as mentioned during the 2012 cycle of election debates — the first time since 1988 that it has been ignored.

Here in New York, we're lucky to have a politician who is a global leader in advocating for the reduction of carbon emissions. "Mayor Bloomberg has consistently shown leadership on taking climate change seriously on a city level and has challenged others around the world to address the causes and impacts," says Tara DePorte, executive director of the Human Impacts Institute, a non-profit environmental organization.

She notes that Bloomberg's efforts to support green infrastructure, energy efficiency, and sustainable transportation have been admirable — even if we have a long way to go.

Another point in Bloomberg's favor: He's helped to make global warming more of an issue for undecided voters. Noting that Superstorm Sandy catalyzed his decision, he endorsed Obama for President on Thursday, noting that the incumbent would do more than his opponent to prevent further climate change. "Over the past four years, President BarackObama has taken major steps to reduce our carbon consumption," Bloomberg wrote.

And yet he has not done nearly enough. Neither have we. "One of the most impactful things we can do is consume less," says DePorte. "This comes before reusing and recycling." Even more importantly, perhaps, we desperately need to elect politicians who will give climate change the attention it deserves, and pressure them to effect changes.

At the same time, de-politicizing the issue global warming is crucial.

"It is not red or blue or Republican or Democratic," as Solecki points out. "It is a societal challenge." Indeed — one that has already proven its ability to deprive us of the basic things we need for survival; one that will increasingly threaten life as we know, especially if we don't do everything we can to slow it down.

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