Climate Change Information Resources
New York Metropolitan Region
(CCIR-NYC)

What can individuals in the New York Metropolitan Region do to slow down climate change?

Key Points
Individual actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions can help to slow climate change. Many actions have synergistic, or "win-win" effects. Choosing modes of transportation, new appliances, and building materials that are energy efficient can often save money in addition to reducing emissions. Planting shade trees can both reduce emissions and raise property values. Engaging with decision-makers can enhance the impact of individual actions.

Slowing Down Climate Change
The burning of fossil fuels to produce energy and power automobiles, deforestation from the harvest of timber products, and the conversion of naturally-vegetated land to urban, suburban, and agricultural areas have increased the concentration of greenhouses gases, and particularly carbon dioxide (CO_2), in the atmosphere. Individuals can slow down climate change by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases associated with their daily energy consumption in the home and on the road. Because each molecule of CO_2 remains in the atmosphere for ~100 years, reducing emissions today will continue to have an impact on concentrations of CO_2 for long time periods. These actions can help to slow climate change over decadal and century-long scales. Thr main areas in which individuals can take action relate to transportation, and home and neighborhood.

Transportation
The transportation sector accounts for about half of all emissions of greenhouse gases in the region. By choosing to drive less, form carpools, or use public transportation, individuals can reduce their contribution to the release of greenhouse gases. Individuals can also choose to purchase cars with greater fuel efficiency. Those who travel frequently by airplane may also want to consider that air travel is one of the fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation of non-local foods to local supermarkets, and transportation of waste to landfills and/or incinerators, are also substantial sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Purchasing local foods and attempting to reduce waste thus also reduces an individual's contribution to emissions.

Home and Neighborhood
Many strategies for reducing home energy use can cut greenhouse gas emissions and also save money when reduced energy use translates into lower energy bills. Individuals can choose to purchase energy-efficient home appliances, electronics, office equipment, and light bulbs. The EPA Energy Star program maintains an extensive list of energy-efficient products. People can also improve the insulation in their homes to reduce energy required for heating and cooling, add skylights to improve natural lighting, or consider solar panels, a reflective roof or a vegetated roof ("green roof"). Finally, residents with open space around their homes can plant deciduous shade trees in strategic locations. City-dwellers without yards can help to start or support neighborhood tree-planting programs. Shade trees can help reduce cooling bills in the summer. In addition to reducing energy needs, trees can also store carbon dioxide and remove pollution from the atmosphere.

Engaging with Decision-Makers and Others
Those who are concerned about the impacts of climate change on their communities can express their concerns at community board meetings, by voting for politicians who share their views, by contacting elected officials, and by investing in companies that take a progressive stance on climate change. Engaging decision-makers, as well as local businesses and neighbors, is an important step to reducing a community's contribution to climate change.

References

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EPA Energy Star Program http://www.energystar.gov/

EPA Global Warming Visitor Center http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/content/VisitorCenterConcernedCitizens.html

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Safe Climate, Actions for Individuals http://www.safeclimate.net/action/

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