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One Tragedy, One Action

Amy Fosler

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, aefosler@gmail.com

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One Tragedy, One Action

Course: ENSC 230

Amy Fosler - aefosler@gmail.com

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Over 7 billion people occupy the world we live on today. The number is continuing to rise at faster and faster rates. We all need food, water, shelter and most use transportation and electricity. At the same time we are filling up the earth with people and our amenities, we are simultaneously filling up our atmosphere with greenhouse gases. All of the products we need and some we don't need are depleting our ozone layer and consequently destroying the one planet we have. With over 7 billion people in this world, how is one person supposed to make any difference when cutting carbon emissions? The answer is not simple, instead very complex and it all must start with each individual.

We are waiting for an energy "miracle" to save us from our self-created problem. We have the technology power and the innovation potential but the timeline is steep. If we are to continue to live the way we do and not change our patterns, our earth will change drastically. Our climate problem is directly related to the tragedy of the commons. Tragedy of the commons is an economics theory created by Garrett Hardin, describing how individuals act independently according to each one's self-interest and do not consider the whole group's long-term best interests. Hardin describes this occurrence as one that has no technical solutions but rather takes changes in human attitudes and behavior. We are so inherently considered about ourselves, our homes, our cars and the list goes on we forget our earth and everyone living here will have drastic life changes if the global warming continues to rise.

Can one person really make a difference? Although tragedy of the commons is a very real issue in the United States, collective action can also become very real. We may be comfortable as we are now but in the long run everyone will be suffering, if they aren't already facing the changes. What's the solution? There will be no miracle technology that we will all collectively use or we won't all buy electric cars. We must vote. We must be educated when voting and know who we are voting into office that will make the policies and regulations to save our planet. People have chosen leaders in other countries who are making difference now.

The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions details certain policies some countries are taking to lessen their total carbon dioxide emissions. Brazil emits over 70 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and land-use change. In 2008, Brazil created the National Climate Change Policy trying to reduce emissions by 37 percent through measures including energy sources, forests and agriculture, industry, and transportation. China is the world's largest consumer of coal and their CO₂ emissions are now the highest of any country. In 2010 China agreed in the Cancun Agreements to reduce their carbon outputs by 45 percent by 2020. C2ES did not mention on their site any strides that the United States, as a key country, are making in changing their energy policies to reduce emissions.

The IPCC outlines several different sectors we use energy on today and suggests adaptation and mitigation policies. In regards to energy supply, improving the supply and distribution efficiency, switching from coal to gas and nuclear power, and using renewable resources. To reach these goals we will need reduction of fossil fuel subsidies, taxes on fossil fuels, and subsidies for renewable producers. Although this is just one sector, all of these policies, taxes, and subsidies can become real and reduce our emissions if we can come together to vote in an educated way to make these changes.

As much as we, as a society, would like to blame industry and government for our high emission rates and depleting ozone layer, we have to look into the public to save our earth. We as individuals have the power to vote and change the ways we use industry and agriculture to survive. We could take the next step in making voting day a national holiday, more awareness and feasibility to go and vote. Until technology can catch up, the masses can make an educated vote, and we can take steps to lessen our impact on pollution and carbon dioxide outputs.

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