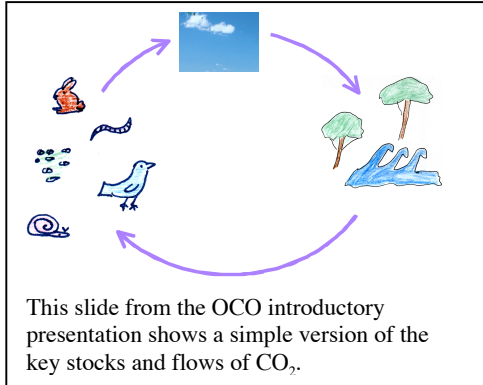


# Our Climate Ourselves

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We need citizens with informed intuitions about how the climate system works.

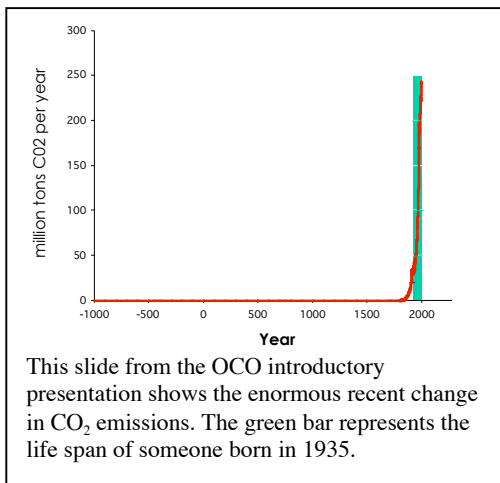
Surveys show that many US citizens believe that climate change is serious and real, but that it is safe to delay action on the problem until there is more evidence that climate change is harmful. Climate scientists, in contrast are quite clear that substantial, immediate steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are necessary. For instance in January 2005, Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called for

“immediate and very deep cuts in carbon dioxide pollution if humanity is to survive.”

This split between scientific consensus and public opinion is particularly important in light of calls from political leaders in the US for more voter support for legislation on climate policy. For instance in 2004 Senator John McCain reflected on the failure to win Congressional approval of the McCain-Lieberman Climate Stewardship Act -- *"We've made a modest effort with this bill. But until enough citizens who are voters care, then these special interests will be able to block any meaningful policy change. It's*

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— Senator John McCain



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Why does the public view differ from the scientific consensus? Systems dynamics researchers John Sterman and Linda Booth Sweeney offer one compelling explanation. In studies on public understanding of the climate system they identified two common and dangerous misconceptions.

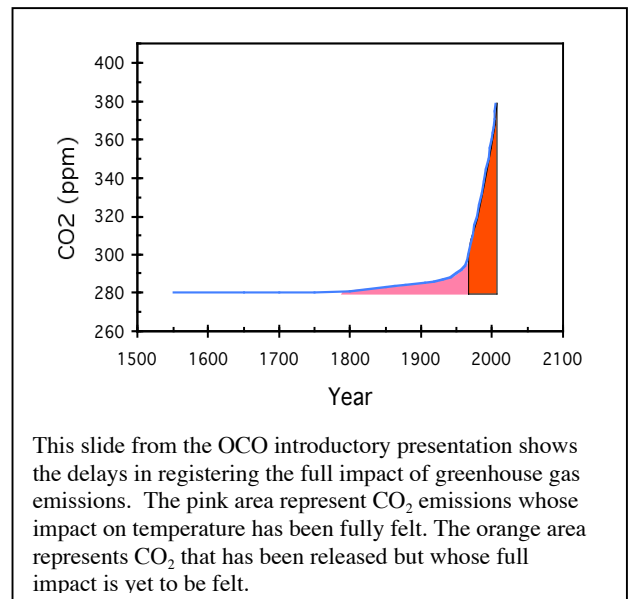
- ◆ Two-thirds of their subjects believed that global temperature responds quickly to changes in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. *In fact, it takes decades for the climate to fully respond to changes in CO<sub>2</sub> levels.*
- ◆ More than two-thirds of their subjects believed that small reductions in emissions would stabilize the climate. *In fact, emissions would need to be cut nearly in half to stabilize CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere, with smaller emissions cuts levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere would still continue to rise .*

Sterman and Both Sweney’s research indicates that a popular, “common sense” view of the climate system leads people to assume that we can quickly reverse climate change by making small changes in emissions. And under such an assumption a “wait-and-see” approach makes logical sense.

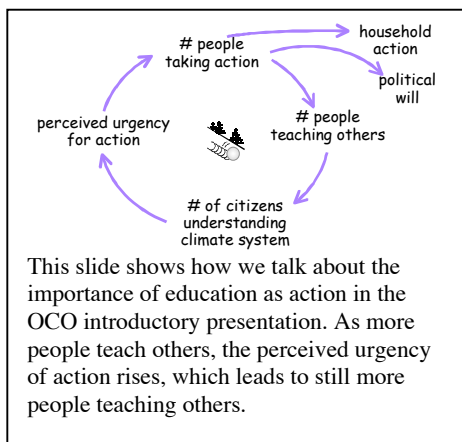
The Our Climate Ourselves program is an effort to provide an antidote to these common, action-inhibiting misunderstandings about the climate system. We believe that when misunderstandings contribute to inaction, education is a critical form of action.

## Our Climate Ourselves Methodology

We create systems-thinking-based presentations and materials that support people educating themselves, their friends, neighbors, and co-workers about climate change. Our first product is a one-hour introductory presentation about how the climate system works and the most powerful leverage points for addressing climate change. The presentation stresses improving our intuitions about climate change, especially the long delays in the climate system and the need to reduce emissions to the amount of greenhouse gases that can be absorbed by the Earth. It also focuses on the many options available to us for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.



So far we have piloted the presentation in Woodstock, Vermont and Hartland, Vermont, Amherst, Massachusetts, and Palo Alto, California, with a combined audience of approximately two hundred people ranging from college students, to conservation educators, to neighbors, to NGO activists. With each pilot presentation we have focused on learning how to make the presentation more clear and more compelling.



Building on Sustainability Institute’s past work developing “train-the-trainer” programs on systems thinking for sustainability, we plan over the next year to develop the Our Climate Ourselves presentation into a “train-the-trainer” format so that people who attend a presentation can take action on what they have learned by either organizing a presentation venue in their home, workplace or church, and/or by becoming trained as presenters themselves.