

## Toolkit to Declare a Climate Emergency

### ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to help cities declare a climate emergency.

In this “Climate Emergency: Toolkit for Cities” you will find:

- [Top line background](#) on the rise of climate emergency declarations and why they are relevant for cities
- The practical steps of [how to declare a climate emergency](#), including templates
- [Alternative to declaring a climate emergency](#)
- [Key messages](#) for use in on and offline communications
- [Q&A](#) for use in media engagement

The GCoM Board and partners have collaborated on a climate emergency toolkit as a response of the networks of local and regional governments towards the UN Climate Action Summit under the Infrastructure, Cities and Local Action Track. It also brings together resources and practical experience from those cities that have already declared an emergency (or similar declarations) to be shared with other cities.

### BACKGROUND

Reaching to climate neutrality by the mid-century through a multilevel collaboration is one of the most unique, innovative and strong provisions of the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015.

Currently, over 900 jurisdictions in 18 countries have [declared](#) a ‘climate emergency’.

While this initiative started in 2016, the wakeup calls through the [IPCC Special Report on Global Warming](#) of 1.5°C (SR1.5) (lets also give link to IPCC 1.5SR Summary for Urban Policy Makers as well) and grassroots mobilization in particular like the Fridays4Future movement played a key role to trigger this initiative into a global movement. In doing so they have committed to bold action and awareness raising of the urgency of the issue in their community.

The vast majority of cities that have declared a climate emergency are in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Although there are many resources for jurisdictions in these regions, there is a gap in experience and best-practice sharing with other regions of the world, where emergency declarations are being made in different ways. There is therefore a need for greater coordination, to ensure cities speak with one voice on this emerging trend.

### HOW TO DECLARE A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Most Climate Emergency Declarations call for zero carbon by 2030. As individual municipalities cannot achieve zero carbon without other cities and levels of government joining the effort, some have chosen to simply commit to local action compatible with IPCC recommendations for keeping warming under 1.5°C.

There are [three key steps](#) to declaring a climate emergency:

1. [Pass declaration\(s\) of Climate Emergency with commitment to reach zero emissions and begin decarbonization at emergency speed \(i.e. within 10 years\).](#)

- The European City Network [Climate Alliance](#) has produced an emergency declaration [resolution template](#) as a resource for cities.
  - The US grassroots advocacy group [Climate Mobilization](#) has a series of open source templates on declaring a climate emergency, where you can find templates for a [Local Government Declaration](#) and a [Green New Deal Climate Emergency Resolution](#).
2. Local elected leaders become advocates for emergency climate mobilization to the public, media, other cities, and towards state and national governments.

The key messages and Q&A provided below are intended to serve as a resource for advocacy communications activities. Given that every city's media landscape, public media consumption habits and relationship with national governments are unique, these will necessarily be adapted to fit the local context. As such, cities are advised integrate this advocacy into their existing communication strategies.

3. Develop and implement mobilization policies locally, after the declaration has been passed.
- The C40 Guideline on '[Defining Carbon Neutrality for Cities & Managing Residual Emissions](#)' provides a comprehensive overview of potential approaches and policies for achieving carbon neutrality from a city perspective.
  - ICLEI has compiled a 4-step guide to achieving climate neutrality based on the principles of GoLow/Divest/Invest/Offset, with real life examples from the cities that adopted these approaches. Consult the full guide [here](#).
  - ARUP has developed a guide for local authorities on the next steps for action after the declaration [You've declared a climate emergency... what next?](#)
  - As a city committed to the Global Covenant of Mayors, you can register, implement, and monitor your strategic action plans and make the information on your efforts and results publicly available through [GCoM's reporting platforms](#)

The City of Darebin, Australia was the first to declare a climate emergency. Since the declaration they have created a climate action plan and resources for other cities on how to declare and steps to take after the declaration.

## DAREBIN: MOVING BEYOND TOKENISM

*"In 2016 Darebin Council became the first government body in the world to declare a climate emergency. Our leadership and initiative, spurred on by local community members, sparked a global movement, with hundreds of councils across multiple countries now calling for a climate emergency response." - Mayor's Foreword*

### Five key processes to declaring a climate emergency:

#### 1. Take Leadership:

- Recognize that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, including by local councils
- Committing to tackling climate change, by taking urgent action at a scale and speed that will restore a safe climate.

#### 2. Embed climate emergency action in all council strategies, plans and actions:

- After declaring a climate emergency your council should develop a Climate Emergency Plan.
- This should outline all actions your council will take to embed a climate emergency response into its operations.

#### 3. Mobilize and build the climate emergency mandate:

- Councils can support our communities to take action, through raising awareness about the climate emergency; providing targeted programs to make homes and businesses powered by renewable energy; or mobilizing volunteers to spread the climate emergency message to neighborhoods, families, and workplaces.

#### 4. Reach out to other councils:

- We now need to act strategically and collaboratively to figure out the key challenge: how we can make an effective and meaningful response beyond the declaration

#### 5. Advocate to state and federal government

- Advocate for effective action and significant changes to state, federal and international government policy, legislation and funding

More information can be found in the [DCC Climate Emergency Resource](#)

## ALTERNATIVE TO DECLARING A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

An alternative approach to declaring a climate emergency is to declare [poor air quality conditions to be a disaster](#). Poor air quality is related to climate change in that the source of the problem, high emissions and pollutants in the atmosphere, are the same. Unlike climate change, however, when air quality index levels reach high pollution levels, there is an immediate impact on public health. There is a need for the general public to adapt their behavior to limit harmful exposure to these environments. This direct impact on daily life activities can potentially bring about broader public acceptance of the need to drastically reduce the causes of this environmental degradation. Seoul, South Korea was the first city in Korea to use the term "disaster" in reference to problematic levels of particulate matter (including both PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>). The Seoul Metropolitan Government officially declared PM as a disaster by revising Seoul Metropolitan Government ordinance to include PM as a natural disaster and providing 'Action Manual' to the vulnerable citizens in July 2017<sup>12</sup> Since then the national government has followed, and declared PM as a disaster in national law.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/13/social-disaster-south-korea-brings-in-emergency-laws-to-tackle-dust-pollution>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20190313000434>

Air quality has been a serious issue for the public and has only gotten increased attention as the awareness of the impact of unsafe PM levels increases among citizens. Both Mayor Won Soon Park and his predecessor committed to improving air quality and came under pressure to take serious action.

## SEOUL: DISASTER CASE STUDY

### Public engagement process:

- When the Seoul Metropolitan Government decided to declare PM as a disaster, they first held citizen public hearings to gather feedback from;
- They gathered feedback through public roundtables and 10 major measures that should be put in place in the event of high PM concentration levels;
- The new measures were also posted on the website for the public to see.

### New measures put in place after declaring PM as a “Disaster”

- Emergency text alerts when PM levels are dangerous for the public asking to wear masks and refrain from outdoor activities;
- High-emitting vehicles are refrained from entering the city. SMG worked with the Ministry of Environment to send out an information note to the vehicle owners who possess high emitting cars (i.e. diesel cars without DPF device) to provide necessary information (such as when they cannot drive their cars into the city) and warning that they will be subject to penalty if they operate the vehicle in the city.

### Communicating on the “Disaster”

- Distributing a press release to the local media;
- Mayor Park held a press conference to inform of the new measures;
- Posted the new measures on the website;
- Local media responded positively to the new declaration and measures and good coverage was provided.

## KEY MESSAGES

- With 2018 having brought all manner of record-breaking climate extremes, and global average temperatures projected to reach 3.2°C above the pre-industrial average based on current national pledges and targets for greenhouse emissions, our recognition of climate emergency is both highly appropriate and a major turning-point for our cities.
- Climate science, as well as increasing incidences of natural disasters around the world, demonstrate that climate change threatens devastating impacts for the whole of human civilization. From droughts and wildfires to rising sea levels and climate refugees,<sup>3</sup> the potential cost of a slow, gradual approach to climate change cannot be overstated. Impacts at 2 Degrees of temperature rise above pre-industrial levels will be considerably more severe than at 1.5 Degrees. Every emissions reduction and resilience increasing action is important.
- Allowing global average temperatures to reach +2°C would be catastrophic. At the current level of global warming (+0.9°C above pre-industrial levels) are already having an enormous effect on our planet. If global warming continues at the current rate, the melting of the polar ice caps will mean sea levels will continue to rise by 3.2 millimeters per year, causing many coastal cities across the world to disappear within 80 years.
- Slow, gradualist policy has, in recent years, been more politically palatable than ambitious climate action. We are out of time for slow, gradualist policy. The emergency action call is increasingly being taken up by leading scientists and responsible leaders around the world as extreme events escalate.
- The global cost of inaction on climate change projected to reach a staggering 23 trillion USD per year by the end of the century (equivalent to around five 2008 global financial crises every year).<sup>4</sup> In economic terms, we need to act now, and act quickly, to secure the future wellbeing of our people.
- You are not acting alone. Nearly 1,000 local authorities have done so. You can keep up to date with the global list of Emergency Declarations at:  
<https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens/>

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.earth-policy.org/images/uploads/press\\_room/SciAm-final.pdf](http://www.earth-policy.org/images/uploads/press_room/SciAm-final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1029/2018EF000922>

**TEMPLATE PRESS RELEASE****City of [CITY NAME] Declares a Climate Emergency**

*As cities globally participate in climate strikes as the world's leaders prepare to meet at the United Nations for the Secretary General's Climate Action Summit and General Assembly, the City of [City Name] declares a climate emergency recognizing that climate change poses a serious risk and must be treated with urgency.*

**City of [City Name], [Day] September 2019**

On [Day], Mayor [X] / [City] City Council unanimously voted to declare a climate emergency. With 2019 having brought all manner of record-breaking climate extremes, and climate disasters, including the recent forest fires in the Amazon rainforest and throughout Africa, and the global average temperatures projected to reach 3.2°C above the pre-industrial average based on current national pledges and targets for greenhouse emissions, [City Name]'s recognition of the climate emergency is both highly appropriate and a major turning-point.

[City Name] joins an international movement now with over 1,000 jurisdictions across 18 countries declaring a climate emergency. It recognizes that urgent action is required to reduce emissions and to address climate change impacts.

Citizens in [City Name] and around the world have a fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education, healthcare, and shelter; and as a local government we are dedicated to making this a priority.

As a part of the climate emergency declaration, [City Name] has committed to (examples of potential actions as part of a climate emergency declaration):

- *Source 100% renewable energy by 20xx*
- *Support businesses to reduce emissions by xx% by 20xx*
- *By 20xx, xx% of trips will be made by active transportation and transit*
- *Make it affordable and easier for residents and businesses to get a permit for heat pumps (or other renewable energy infrastructure)*
- *Carbon neutral city by 20xx*
- *Build local engagement with climate emergency action broadly and deeply*

This declaration builds on [City Name]'s existing commitment to the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, where [City Name] has already committed to [insert existing climate actions/targets] and joins over 10,000 cities from 132 countries working towards a resilient and low-emission society.

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For more information:  
[Contact Information]

## Q&A

### **What is a climate emergency?**

A Declaration of Climate Emergency is a resolution passed by a governing body such as a city council, a county board of supervisors, a state legislature, or even a national government. It puts the government on record in support of emergency action to reverse global warming. Resolutions vary around the world, with many governments including local climate impacts and new climate goals in their resolution. An official national declaration of climate emergency puts a government on a “climate mobilization” that places climate change at the center of policy and planning decisions.

### **What is climate mobilization?**

Climate mobilization is an economic approach that directs the collective force of industry away from consumerism and profiteering towards a singular national purpose. In recent history these kinds of rapid mobilizations tended to occur during periods of conflict (e.g. World War II). It is not an indiscriminate use of government power, but a change in behavior to focus efforts towards an agreed national mission.

### **Why an emergency response?**

According to the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C (SR1.5) of the United Nations, we have until 2030 to limit a climate change catastrophe. This study shows that to exceed 1.5C would mean putting the very livability of our planet in jeopardy is dicing with the planet's livability. We are living in a climate crisis, which requires an emergency response.

### **What effect does zero carbon have on our economies?**

There are many sectors of the economy that are set to grow rapidly in a state of climate emergency, namely those that contribute towards achieving our goal of carbon neutrality, e.g. agriculture, energy efficiency, construction. Emissions intensive sectors will necessarily be negatively affected as behaviors evolve and change. Studies show that it is in fact inaction on the growing climate change crisis that will have the biggest negative effect on our global economy – to the tune of 23 trillion USD per year by the end of the century (equivalent to around five 2008 global financial crises every year).

### **How do we achieve rapid emissions reductions?**

Resource and energy efficiency standards will be established in order to substantially curb emissions in the most polluting sectors, such as manufacturing and transportation. We will need significant investment in energy efficient infrastructure (such as alternative modes of transport) and clean energy.

### **What will be the impact for citizens?**

While the impact of climate change can often seem to be a distant issue for citizens, we know that we and the next generation are and will be facing severe consequences should we not act now on climate change. The impact of climate change is already being felt; from flash flooding to wildfires, climate change is already disrupting the daily lives of citizens. A climate emergency puts the climate at the center of policies going forward, but prioritizing climate action can only be done in conjunction with tackling the equality and socioeconomic circumstances citizens face, which necessarily has an impact on the effectiveness of climate action.