

Local climate plans a key to progress

Hard to hit goals, but they're working

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USA TODAY

Grim warnings from the world's leading climate scientists on Monday make clear the earth now faces irreversible changes from global warming and stress the need for immediate and wide-scale greenhouse gas reductions to avoid further damage.

Calling it a "code red for humanity," the report says that limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels "will be beyond reach" in the next two decades. That will mean more flooding, more wildfires, more wild swings in weather.

Those startling projections come despite a chorus of pledges to curb carbon emissions from coast to coast.

Over the past three decades, more than 600 local governments across the United States adopted their own climate action plans setting greenhouse gas reduction targets. These pledges were in addition to America's commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement, an international treaty signed by nearly 200 nations to limit the impact of climate change.

But experts now say many of those cities' plans were aspirational at best. Now they must work harder if they're going to curb the warming trend.

The USA TODAY Network reached out to half a dozen communities with climate plans. Reporters found some have made progress on reducing emissions, but others struggle to keep pace.

USA TODAY Network's findings are consistent with a study last year by the nonprofit Brookings Institution. It found just 45 of the 100 largest U.S. cities had adopted a serious climate pledge, and two-thirds of those with plans have fallen short of their targets. More than a dozen appeared to have no emissions tracking at all.

The good news is that those 45 communities have made a small difference, the Brookings Institution said. Together, they will eliminate some 6% of total annual U.S. emissions compared with 2017 levels – the equivalent of 365 million metric tons of carbon pollution or taking 79 million vehicles off the road.

A small window of opportunity remains for local governments to get

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