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Will COVID-19 Lessons Help Us Survive Climate Change?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a social, humanitarian, and economic crisis that was predicted by experts but made worse by our failure to act proactively on those warnings. The **Iowa Climate Statement 2020: Will COVID-19 Lessons Help Us Survive Climate Change?** released today suggests a path forward to address climate change. We have learned important lessons from the pandemic that can inform our ability to tackle the significant and unrelenting challenge of climate change in Iowa.

“The first lesson the pandemic has taught us is the best plan for addressing both the pandemic and climate change is to rely on best available science,” said **Dave Courard-Hauri**, Chair of Environmental Science and Sustainability at Drake University. “Professional public health and climate change experts are the most reliable source of information for decision-makers and citizens in making informed choices that protect life and property.”

“Unfortunately, in the face of political polarization, some have taken up the strategy of de-legitimizing science, but this distrust in expert guidance has led to preventable deaths and economic damage to working people and businesses,” continued **Courard-Hauri**.

“The second lesson learned is that the cost of not being prepared for the pandemic has far outweighed the costs of prevention and preparation,” said, **Silvia Secchi**, Associate Professor, Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences at the University of Iowa. “The cost of ignoring climate change is no different. Proactive efforts to address climate change have been proven to save lives and money.”

The tenth annual **Iowa Climate Statement 2020: Will COVID-19 Lessons Help Us Survive Climate Change?** was endorsed by a record 230 Iowa science faculty and researchers from 37 Iowa colleges and universities.

“The third lesson we should take from the pandemic is how incredibly vulnerable many people and families are living in our communities, said **Eric Tate**, Associate Professor of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences at the University of Iowa. “The disproportionate number of poor people and racial minorities who have suffered severe illness or death from this pandemic has highlighted deep inequities.”

“Inequity reduces resilience, leaving poor communities, particularly communities of color, disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate-related natural disasters, just as they are to disease,” said **Tate**.

These lessons show us that smart investments in public health and climate mitigation and adaptation will create more resilient communities and people,” said **Eric Tate**. “Building community resilience against multiple threats is critical, especially for the most vulnerable among us.”

“As the country considers stimulus investments to rebuild our economy, our leaders should adopt comprehensive rebuilding strategies that invest in energy efficiency programs, renewable energy, electric and smart vehicles and research and development.” said **Tate**. “These smart investments now will better prepare us for the coming decades when extreme weather events will become more costly, more common and more severe.”

The UI Center for Global and Regional Environmental Research has coordinated the release of annual climate statements since 2011. These statements, vetted by Iowa’s top experts, place pivotal climate change research into an Iowa-specific context, encouraging preparedness and resilience in the face of a climate crisis.

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The lead authors of the 2020 statement include: **David Courard-Hauri**, Chair of Environmental Science and Sustainability, Drake University; **Greg Carmichael**, co-director, UI Center for Global and Regional Environmental Research; **Ulrike Passe**, Associate Professor of Architecture, Director Center for Building Energy Research, Iowa State University; **Silvia Secchi**, Associate Professor, Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences, University of Iowa; **Gene Takle**, Emeritus Professor of Agronomy at Iowa State University and **Eric Tate**, Associate Professor of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences, University of Iowa.

Also contributing to the statement were: **Bill Gutowski**, Professor of Meteorology Department of Geological and Atmospheric Sciences, Iowa State University; **David Osterberg**, Emeritus Professor, College of Public Health, University of Iowa; **Jerry Schnoor**, Co-director, UI Center for Global and Regional Environmental Research; **Elizabeth A. Stone**, Associate Professor Department of Chemistry University of Iowa and **Peter S. Thorne**, Professor and Head, Occupational & Environmental Health, Associate Director, Environmental Health Sciences Research Center College of Public Health, University of Iowa.

The 37 colleges and universities of statement endorsers:

Central College
Clarke University
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Coe College
Cornell College
Des Moines Area Community College
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Dordt College
Drake University
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Grandview University
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Endorser affiliations are for identification purposes only and do not reflect views of their academic institutions.

The previous statements are available at
www.iowaenvironmentalfocus.org