

Connecting Health and Climate Change

Defining challenges; finding solutions

GHI sparks conversation, action on climate/health issues

With “Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities for Global Health,” published September 22, 2014, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, GHI Director and lead author **Jonathan Patz** brought international attention to the immediate health dangers of climate change and the health benefits of mitigation.

“Health is inextricably linked to climate change,” the study reports. “It is important for clinicians to understand this relationship in order to discuss associated health risks with their patients and to inform public policy.” The risks range from increased heat stress to decreased crop yields. The benefits of reducing fossil fuel consumption include better air quality, increased physical activity, and less chronic disease.

[Read more.](#)



Countries such as Ethiopia produce little carbon dioxide yet are among those most vulnerable to climate change.

The year of the bicycle

Monona (Wisconsin) Mayor Bob Miller credited **Maggie Grabow**, GHI post-doctoral researcher, for inspiring that city’s Year of the Bike. “She really got me excited about the value, from a health standpoint, of biking within a five-mile radius of your home,” he said. Grabow works with Jonathan Patz on issues of the built environment and health, including research showing the environmental and health benefits of active commutes by biking and walking. [Read more.](#)

Exceeding world’s capacity

Humanity has moved beyond a “safe operating space,” according to a report co-authored by GHI Advisory member **Steve Carpenter**, Center for Limnology director. Climate and land-system change, the loss of biodiversity, and nutrient pollution have pushed past four of nine natural boundaries that allow human civilization to exist. The markers define conditions in which modern society evolved. “It might be possible for human civilization to live outside (those) conditions, but it’s never been tried before,” Carpenter said. [Read more.](#)



GHI Director Jonathan Patz, left, and philanthropist John Holton at the U.N. Summit on Climate Change in 2014.

Linking climate and health

World experts—including then Acting Surgeon General Boris Lushniak, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy, and former UW Chancellor and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala—discussed how addressing climate change will benefit health at the “Civil Society Event on Action in Climate Change and Health.” The September 2014 event in New York City, co-hosted by UW’s GHI, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, Office of Sustainability, and Wisconsin Energy Institute, and national and international partners, considered food security, sustainable communities, and the health and climate benefits of cleaner energy. The event was designed to build momentum toward the 2015 Paris Conference of the Parties, where nations will convene in December to forge a new international climate agreement. [Read more.](#)

The John P. Holton Chair in Health and the Environment advances GHI Director Jonathan Patz’s international work to understand and address the health impacts of climate change. Established by entrepreneur John Holton, the chair provides an annual stipend that Patz will use to begin cutting-edge projects and hire staff and students to work on them.

“Good individual health care requires us to direct our attention to the many areas beyond diagnostic medicine, including the environment, food and water, physical activity, vaccinations, and security,” Holton said. He looks to Patz and GHI to find solutions to mitigate the climate crisis and improve health worldwide.

During his 2014-2015 sabbatical year, Patz led climate and health sessions for the African Academies of Science, the World Parks Congress, the first International Council for Science meeting on urban health in Xiamen, China, and the University of Geneva.

[Read more.](#)

“(Sustainability) means reevaluating ... recognizing the future is as important as the present, and the lives of the future are as important as the lives of the present.”

—Lancet editor Richard Horton, opening remarks at the Civil Society Event on Action in Climate Change and Health