

Thomas Jorling was the co-drafter of the original Clean Air and Water Act. A former professor of Environmental Studies and the Director of the Center for Environmental Studies at Williams College, positions he held for fifteen years. He headed New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation and worked as assistant administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Attorney Jorling was a major driving force behind efforts to clean up Boston Harbor. Mr. Jorling travels to top schools throughout the country teaching a seminar in sustainability at such colleges as Williams College, Columbia University, Yale University, the University of Maine, Arizona State University, Grinnell College, Brigham Young University and Boston College. Thomas Jorling is on the Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane advisory board.

URGENCY ISN'T ENOUGH
by Thomas Jorling

Philosophers and scientists agree; the distinguishing characteristic of humans is the capability to foresee the consequences of actions. It is the basis of responsibility and accountability. Science and the scientific method is an important and disciplined way to make that distinguishing characteristic a predictable and reliable basis for acting. Science has revealed the aerodynamics behind the theory of flight so we routinely board aircraft with a sense of security. It has and continues to reveal the basis of modern medicine prolonging life and its quality.

The same scientific method has now established and documented the cumulative effects of injecting greenhouse gases into the life supporting, very thin atmosphere of this blue planet, Earth, so dramatically pictured against the background of blank space in the Apollo 11 and succeeding missions. Specifically, science has measured and calculated the effects on this small blue planet of altering the composition of the atmosphere and thereby causing a significant change in the radiation/energy

dynamics regulating the temperature of the earth. It is warming, and even in human terms, much less the geologic time, it is warming quickly.

We thus face an urgent challenge and test of our ability to foresee the consequences of our actions. Collectively we are taking actions that put at risk the biosphere that has up to now nourished and supported a human population of 7 billion, soon to grow to 10 billion of us, to say nothing of all the other creatures with whom we share this life sustaining planet.

By injecting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, mostly from the combustion of fossil fuels, we are causing the energy balance of the earth to shift, to warm. We are causing the climate to change, the oceans to rise and the increased frequency and amplification of extreme weather events. We are now seeing significant areas of the earth, such as the Indian subcontinent, questioned about their ability to support human life. We can predict increasingly intolerable conditions resulting from resource, food and water shortages causing massive dislocations of people, desperate refugees, violence and suffering. The capability of any nation or the world to respond to personal and property damage from storm events is already being rapidly overwhelmed. These are among the reasons the Defense Department and intelligence agencies consider climate change to be a primary national security risk.

Science tells us that if we act now we can limit the change perhaps to manageable levels— that is a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures. The window to limit the

change to manageable levels is, however, very small and getting smaller because we- the U.S. and the Global community of nations— have not yet even reduced the amount of greenhouse gases injected into the atmosphere.

Never before in human history have we been confronted with such a challenge to our future; a challenge to that distinguishing human characteristic to act and to act responsibly about matters we can foresee.

And we don't need to wring our hands over the intractability of the challenge. Every day, every year and it will for millennia, the sun delivers to earth enough energy to power economies on earth that can deliver a decent quality of life for all. The technologies are available and already cost competitive.

What it will take is a sense of urgency, but urgency is not enough. It will take action; individual action, corporate action, community action, national and global action.

And that action will come when enough humans act to avoid what we can readily foresee; an earth their children and grandchildren will experience in turmoil and upheaval. That time is now.

Should you have any questions or require assistance, please contact Arthur Murphy at amurphy@mhtl.com.

For further information about Thomas Jorling's professional career, please see our website <https://www.mhtl.com/attorney/thomas-jorling/>. For further information about MHTL and articles and advisories on other topics which may be of interest, please visit www.mhtl.com

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Phone (617) 479-5000

Fax (617) 479-6469

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