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CALL FOR EMERGENCY ACTION TO CONTROL GLOBAL TEMPERATURES

UK's share of the global carbon budget will be used up in 3.3 years

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How urgent is an “emergency?”¹ After the 2019 street protests, many national and local administrations declared a climate emergency but have since failed to implement the “rapid and far reaching transitions” recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 report² that sparked the protests.

The urgency of the climate emergency can be quantified by the carbon budget—how much more carbon dioxide (CO₂) can be dumped into the atmosphere—and by how long this budget will last at current emission rates. The IPCC gives 400 billion tonnes of CO₂ from January 2020 as the global carbon budget to keep global warming within 1.5°C with 67% confidence.³ This is 50 tonnes each for the eight billion world population. The UK's annual CO₂ emissions are around 10 tonnes per person,⁴ so the UK's fair share will last five years, that is until December 2024—just 3.3 years away. The Tyndall Centre has published similar calculations for each UK local authority.⁵

Why is the need for annual emission cuts of over 10% not common knowledge? Firstly, the UK government's *Net Zero 2050* timescale omits emissions from imports, ignores the Paris commitment to global equity, and relies heavily on unproven technology.⁶ The government's claims generally go unchallenged, but youth climate activists have pointed out the deceptions.^{7 8}

Secondly, many scientists and non-governmental organisations are self-censoring about the urgency of the situation.⁹ Campaigning against airport expansion is easier than explaining that leisure flying is incompatible with living within our residual carbon budget.

Another UN climate change conference (COP) might help, but the priorities are that everyone tells the truth about the climate emergency, treats it as an emergency, and calls out misinformation and deceptions, as Scientists for Global Responsibility advocate.¹⁰ We clearly cannot trust governments to act appropriately, so good policy making requires the involvement of citizens, especially health professionals with their experience in making and explaining tough choices.

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Full response at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n1734/r-7>.

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