

Aloha reality



By Nate Smelle

There are no words to describe the pain and anguish that the people of Maui are feeling in the wake of the recent wildfires that scorched the Hawaiian island, and cremated nearly the entire village of Lahaina last week. Tragically with every day that passes this summer, there is a rapidly growing number of people around the world who can understand their suffering through their own firsthand experience of the climate emergency our leaders on have been ignoring for far too long.

Sipping down a pint of Claim Jumper at the Bancroft Brew Pub watching videos posted online by many of the residents of Lahaina as they fled the flames consuming their community I was astonished by the insensitivity and ignorance of some of the climate change deniers weighing in below.

Without even addressing their absence of empathy for those who lost loved ones in Lahaina, how can anyone in their right mind even attempt to refute that we are living amid a climate crisis that poses an existential threat to the very survival of our species?

For those still choosing to turn a blind eye to the warnings from the overwhelming majority of the scientific community over the past three decades, it is time to start paying attention to the news. This doesn't mean instantly believing every bit of news you consume. In fact it means the exact opposite. To check the credibility of a news report, it requires that you take the time to do your own digging to get to the bottom of the story that you are reading, watching, or listening to.

Even more important than this initial step in one's personal investigation is following a story as it develops. In many cases this can take days, weeks, months, years, even decades. For the most committed investigative journalists there is truly no end to this endeavour since eventually one comes to understand that every story never really stops evolving.

Nevertheless, for most who invest their time in understanding a story beyond the time it takes to read its headline, the deeper one digs, the more one's comprehension of the issue grows.

For the past two decades I have personally been following the climate crisis. During this time I have discerned several patterns emerge from between the lines of the countless reports I have gobbled up. As I sat there at the Bancroft Brew Pub thinking about how this story has evolved over the last 20+ years, my ears picked up the random babbling of a climate change denier sitting nearby. Listening to them fail to explain the origins of the wildfire smoke that blanketed Bancroft ? as well as communities from northern Quebec to New York City to northern Spain ? I was reminded of how many times I have heard the same lame duck arguments employed against taking action on the climate emergency.

Back when I first started hearing these fairytales in the late '90s, I had much more patience for such consumers of ridiculous conspiracies. If back then someone had told me with a straight face that the reason for the unprecedented wildfire season we are experiencing in Canada and around the world was 'Jewish space lasers' I would have clinked glasses with them and laughed it off. Now that the deadly footprint of climate change has become so painfully tangible as the world burns and boils around us, my patience for such ignorance has turned to ash.

While there is not enough time and editorial space available to speak to the entire evolution of the climate emergency here, taking a look back on the summer of 2023 will provide some insight into the state of the crisis today.

So, for those who would rather believe in the narrative the fossil fuel industry has been paying to spread since they realized their days were numbered, here are some facts to chew on:

On March 20, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a study conducted over the previous eight years which again warned humanity of more extreme heatwaves, severe flooding, intensifying storms, and rising sea levels. The report, which the United Nations called 'A Survival Guide for Humanity' was released at a conference in Interlaken, Switzerland, where the glaciers in the mountains above lost six per cent of their volume in the last year alone.

That same month, what would become the worst wildfire season in Canada's recorded history began.

By early June smoke from the Canadian wildfires was declared a threat to human health as it travelled throughout North America and around the world.

On July 17, thousands of people in Greece along with livestock fled wildfires caused by a heatwave cooking three continents (North America, Europe, and Asia).

That week China recorded its highest temperature ever (126 °F, 52 °C); while a heat dome over California drove the temperature up to 128 °F, (53 °C)

While much of the world was experiencing drought caused by the record-setting temperatures, floods in South Korea took the lives of 40 people and wiped out significant food crops.

On July 19, the health-care system in Italy released a study showing that 20 per cent increase in hospitalizations for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, dehydration, and heat-induced confusion.

On July 24, two pilots were killed when their plane crashed as they battled the wildfires in Greece.

On July 26 the National Weather Service issued heat alerts affecting more than 100 million people in the U.S.

That day the highest ever coastal water temperatures were recorded off the coast of Florida (100 °F, 37.8 °C); breaking the previous record of 99.7 °F recorded in Kuwait Bay in 2020.

Reports of coral reef bleaching and a potentially catastrophic die-off were released on this same day as well.

That week 40 people also perished as a wildfire engulfed the Mediterranean region in Italy.

Another 34 died in Algeria, including 10 soldiers as another wildfire torched yet another community.

On July 27, the UN's Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced that the world had officially entered an era of 'global boiling.'

? As of press time on Tuesday, Aug. 15, 99 people were reported to have died in the wildfire that levelled the village of Lahaina and scorched the Hawaiian island of Maui ? including some who drowned after jumping into the ocean to escape the flames. With more than 1,000 people still missing, the death toll is expected to rise.

These are the facts; do with them as you please.