

SPEAK UP & ACT NOW: SHORT GUIDES TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGEⁱ

GOVERNMENT ACTION

QUESTION: What is the role of government in addressing climate change and how do we effectively push governments to take action?

ANSWER: Government at all levels has significant authority to regulate the use of fossil fuels, the primary driver of climate change, and accelerate the transition to clean energy. State and federal agencies have the authority to establish statewide and national long-term policies, regulations, and funding incentives to decarbonize. They also have the authority to regulate industries and utilities to prevent pollution, including the emission of greenhouse gases. Local governments have the authority to adopt municipal plans and policies to address climate change. They also have permitting authority for fossil fuel and renewable energy projects in their municipality or county.

Governments are also responsible for public infrastructure, which is threatened by climate change, and for the social services that provide a safety net for those impacted by climate change.

Governments need to support dramatic reductions in our use of fossil fuels (i.e., [decarbonization](#)), acceleration of renewable energy projects, and measures to protect communities from the impacts of climate change at all levels, including international bodies like the G20 and [United Nations Conference of Parties](#).

ACTIONS - WHAT CAN WE DO?

- 1. VOTE!** Support candidates at all levels of government who make climate change mitigation and adaptation central to their policymaking agendas.
- 2. COMMUNICATE AND ADVOCATE.**

Reach out to your government officials at the local, state, and national level. Let them know addressing climate change is a priority for you. Sign up for their newsletters to stay informed about opportunities to make your voice heard. Join with like-minded people to meet with representatives on “lobby days.”

- Virginia residents can find their federal and state representatives using the [Who’s My Legislator](#) online tool.
- Go to your locality’s website to find your local elected representative (e.g., “[Find My District](#)” for the City of Richmond).
- Find out if your locality has an office that coordinates climate actions such as the City of Richmond’s [Office of Sustainability](#).

Join and financially support local, state, and national environmental and climate advocacy organizations. These groups often have well-established relationships with government officials and can exert more influence. They also often join with other environmental and climate advocacy organizations to form powerful coalitions. In Virginia, for example, consider the Virginia Conservation Network, Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN), and Citizens' Climate Lobby.

3. PROVIDE INPUT ON GOVERNMENT DECISIONS. Many government decisions include opportunities to comment in writing or at public meetings to voice your support or concerns. Show up and speak out in favor of climate friendly decisions. You don't need to be an expert to do this! Government agencies are obligated to respond to public input, including revising plans, policies, regulations, or project approvals where appropriate. For example, at the state level you can push for Virginia to return to the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative \(RGGI\)](#), a successful cooperative effort among eleven Eastern states to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Governor Youngkin made an executive decision to remove Virginia from RGGI in 2023. His decision was challenged, and in 2024, the Floyd County Circuit Court ruled his action illegal.

Find information on Virginia state legislation using the [Legislative Information System](#) or on the [Virginia Public Access Project's website](#). Find information on proposed state regulations on the [Virginia Regulatory Town Hall website](#) (use the search tool to find climate change-related actions).

RESOURCES – WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

- [General Assembly Advocacy Resources](#), Virginia Conservation Network
- [Citizen Participation in Virginia's Regulatory Process](#), Virginia Register of Regulations
- [Virginia State Corporation Commission Case Information](#) (use the search tool to find cases related to Dominion Energy, Appalachian Power Company, renewable energy, etc.)
- [Take Action Now](#) (actions at a federal and international scale), The Climate Reality Project
- See actions listed in other "Speak Up & Act Now: Short Guides to Address Climate Change" on fossil fuel and utility companies; renewable energy; transportation; home energy use; food production, consumption, and waste; plastic; data centers in Virginia; sea level rise; and extreme weather.

ⁱ Prepared by members of the University of Richmond Osher Special Interest Group on addressing the climate crisis (2024-25)