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By Marcy Franck

I used to go to work with a terrible secret for someone surrounded by climate scientists: I made coffee using little plastic pods. So I hid them in my desk, waited in the kitchen until the coast was clear, then brewed it and walked back to my desk acting totally natural.

When our leadership changed and my desk ended up right next to our [new director](#), who was also the former head of EPA, I took a hard look at my environmental transgressions and decided that I needed to work harder ... at hiding my coffee pods.

I was successful, until one day a new shipment arrived and a coworker asked what was in the box. "What box?" I asked, trying to gaslight her into thinking there was no box, which is a totally healthy response, thank you for asking.

My caginess made her more curious until finally I told her. "I can't believe you use K-CUPS!" she yelled, as if with a bullhorn. And of course, I wanted to die. But I didn't, and our director didn't storm out to demand my resignation. In fact, life went on as usual, except I felt even more ashamed than before. My coworker ended up feeling down too, when she admitted that she spent too much time on planes to be as green as she'd like.

But shame is not a useful emotion—and when it comes to being a good climate citizen, it can be counterproductive, especially if you think living a

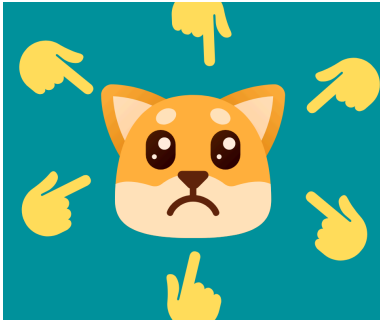
perfectly green life is the most effective climate action. So let's talk about how to absolve climate guilt, and the magic that can happen when you do.

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STEP 1: MAKE A CLIMATE CONFESSION

You have to own it before you can let it go. Too shy to tell a friend? [Confess anonymously to NBC News](#). These people did:



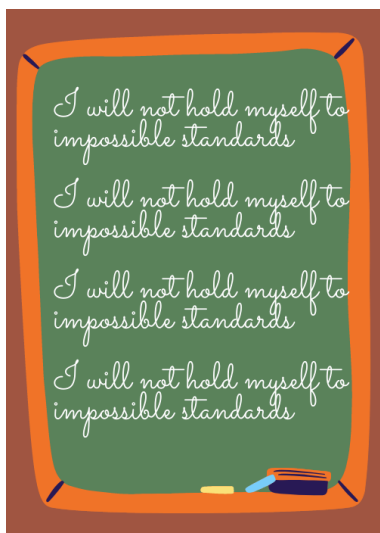
"I'm a good recycler except I overuse paper towels."
"I am writing my confession on a cell phone made of plastic."
"I leave the AC on for my dogs while I'm at work"

Thanks, anonymous confessors, for understanding that your actions matter. But even living an eco-perfect life [isn't enough](#). **We need to sacrifice *whatever feels comfortable* AND work toward big, systemic changes.** Feeling guilty is only going to hold us back.

STEP 2: GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO BE HUMAN

It's about persistence, not perfection.

Climate advocate [Dr. Bruce Bekkar](#) shared his experience leading an audience through climate confessions in the [Tiny Climate Challenge](#) podcast. "It was a remarkably cathartic experience," he said. And I love a good catharsis, so I gave him a call. Some of his advice:



- **Holding ourselves to impossible standards takes a toll.** It's a relief to let go of guilt, which gives ourselves space to engage in climate action at a deeper level.
- **What matters most is our commitment** and willingness to give time and energy to the climate movement, not deny yourself something you want.
- **Connect with others.** The more we can acknowledge that we're not perfect, the more we can understand those not actively working toward solutions. Talking about your own imperfections could help find common ground and inspire someone to engage in the movement.

Check out Dr. Bekkar's [10 tips for self care](#), written for climate advocates. And if you're also a healthcare professional looking to engage in climate action, the free [Climate Health Organizing Fellows program](#) led by our Health Equity Fellow, [Dr. Gaurab Basu](#), is now accepting applications.

STEP 3: PLACE THE BLAME WHERE IT BELONGS

And it ain't on your shoulders, Dear Optimist.

It's not your fault we live in a world choked by pollution, but many large [corporations want you to feel like it is](#), and the oil and gas industry has tried to shift responsibility for climate change away from itself and onto consumers. Blaming ourselves lets polluters off the hook, but our efforts need to focus on holding them accountable. Go deeper:



- [NRDC's Mary Anaise Heglar gets to the point](#) in "I work in the environmental movement. I don't care if you recycle." If you click only one link, make it this one.
- [Katharine Hayhoe explores industry-induced guilt](#), and refocuses attention on actions that matter.
- [Harvard Researchers break down their study](#) on how ExxonMobil uses propaganda tactics to blame individuals for the climate change it has caused.

STEP 4: WORK FOR THE FUTURE YOU WANT TO LIVE IN

I reject the dystopian hellscapes that appear in sci-fi movies and my obsessive thoughts at 3:00am.

Focusing on a thriving future can help you stay motivated and engaged. Visionaries have imagined a greener, more convenient, and equitable planet based on technologies we already have. For inspiration, read about [sustainable cities in 2050](#), the [people working to build them](#), and [how everything we need for a sustainable world in 2040 already exists](#).

Key takeaways:



- **Urban hubs where our needs are met within a small radius.** Think housing, workspaces, small-scale agriculture, social hang outs, maybe even within one building.
- **Revamped transportation systems**, with an emphasis on walking, biking, and public transit that is safer, more affordable, and highly efficient. Our research points to big [climate and health wins](#) here!
- **Increased biodiversity and protected natural environments** that will make cities greener, fresher, and cooler as they produce at least as much energy as they consume.
- **Reliable energy** can be available everywhere from cities to remote villages.
- **Regenerative agriculture** that can sink carbon and produce enough delicious, nutritious food.

STEP 5: THINK GLOBAL ACT LOCAL

All the cool kids are doing it.



Take, for example, [Julian Kelly, a high school junior](#) who attended our [Youth Summits on Climate and Health](#). For his capstone project, he imagined how the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#) applied to his town, then presented a plan to his select board. Does Julian recycle? I have no idea. But we can all be more like Julian.

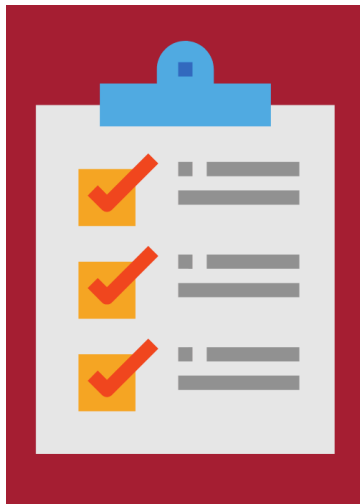


Meet my new climate crush, [@TheGarbageQueen](#) on TikTok. Alaina Wood is a sustainability scientist who [debunks climate doom](#), shares [good climate news](#) on the regular, and explores important science topics like why [potty training cows](#) is good for the environment. Swoon! Check out [why she feels hope in a time of climate anxiety](#).

THERE. DOESN'T THAT FEEL BETTER?

Now it's time to peek at some climate wins.

Here's what we've been up to.



In advance of the Administration's move to [restore mercury limits](#) rolled back during the Trump administration, we updated our [Mercury Matters Science Brief](#).

We're counting down to launch the *Lancet Countdown*: Mark your calendars for October 20 to read the global report that tracks progress on health and climate change, and the companion U.S. Policy Brief, which provides policy recommendations to protect human health from the climate crisis. Our Climate MD leader, [Dr. Renee Salas](#), is a co-author of the global report and lead author of the policy brief. [Watch this space](#) for updates.

As we navigate a busy policy week and COP26, stay informed about how climate affects health with our updated [climate and health resources](#).

News from Climate Week

[China won't build more coal plants abroad](#), which is a big deal because it's the largest financial backer of coal-fired plants overseas.

[Biden pledges to double U.S. climate funding to developing nations](#), vowing to seek Congressional support for a 2009 promise that has been a roadblock to successful UN talks in the past.



Foundations pledge \$5 billion in record funding for biodiversity, supporting the effort to conserve 30% of the planet by 2030.

EPA finalized a rule to reduce hydrofluorocarbons (\$), the ‘greatest super-pollutant known to mankind,’ by 85% in 15 years. “It’s really — frankly, folks — a very big deal,” said Gina McCarthy, our former director and current National Climate Advisor.

Federal agencies draft rules protecting outdoor workers from extreme heat, creating an interagency Heat Illness Prevention Work Group.

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