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By Marcy Franck

## Is it worth clicking on gloomy links if you know they'll pollute your psyche with even more terrible news?

Apparently the answer is yes, because here you are. Welcome to our clickbait issue, in which we tested a research-based theory to see if you'd open a newsletter that sounds like bad news but actually wants to help you feel hopeful about our future. Sorry, not sorry!

According to [a new study](#) that will surprise no one, the more negative words in a headline, the more people will click on it. The kicker is that the data comes from Upworthy.com, a website whose entire mission is to make us feel better about the world. Even they need to season their stories with a tinge of angst to get people to read them.

I chatted about this phenomenon and what it has to do with climate change with my dear friend Don, after he told me that he worried this newsletter was creating false hope that humanity is actually addressing the climate emergency.

Our conversation unfolded not unlike a scene from [Strindberg and Helium at the Beach](#), where Don would send doomy links late at night, and the next morning I'd respond cheerfully with reasons for hope.

It went something like this: Our emissions are off the charts! Yes, but last year we brought them down [way more](#) than expected. Our planet is getting hotter! True, but [we can stay under 1.8°C](#) if countries meet their Paris goals. We're threatening thousands of species with extinction! Indeed, but [190 countries](#) agreed to preserve 30% of land and waters by 2030.

No wonder his nieces and nephews call him Uncle Doom.

Given his choice of supporting links—peppered as they were with words like “doomsday” and “uninhabitable”—I asked if he tends to see more headlines about climate disasters than progress. He said yes. “And if you include the books I read ... well ... doom,” he added for good measure.

Uncle Doom is far from alone. We are living in an era of massive climate action, but our negativity bias, media, and misinformation mingle to make us feel a pervasive sense of doom just the same. The good news is that we can peek behind the curtain to see how these conspiring actors cloud our view of climate progress, and hopefully you'll never see climate change the same way again.

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### Beware the equation of doom

***Our big dumb brains + scary stories + misinformation = climate doom***



**We're hardwired to fixate on bad news:** Our instinct to focus on negative information starts when we're babies. We give it greater weight than positive information, and we remember it longer, possibly because it gives us time to avoid harm. No wonder we click on terrifying links! And the people writing headlines know we will, which is why...



**News outlets produce more negative stories about climate change.** More eyeballs = more advertising dollars. Last year, 40% of all climate coverage in U.S. broadcast media focused on disasters, while only 6% covered the Inflation Reduction Act—America's largest-ever investment in climate action. I MEAN COME ON.



**Similarly, Hollywood portrays climate change** as inevitably ending in an apocalypse. But eventually studios will run out of ways to destroy the Statue of Liberty, right?



**Misinformation also spreads doom:** The fossil fuel industry, keen to protect profits, spreads disinformation to “mislead the public and prevent crucial action to address climate change.” They also fund campaigns claiming that renewable energy projects harm the environment, making us feel wrongfully hopeless by design.



**Both fake news and bad news travel faster on social media**, so it's harder to find good news stories because they are buried under all the scary headlines. Recall the cautionary tale of Aisha and the Methane Plume, and don't let that happen to you!

**Reality check:** Beyond the headlines, echo chambers, and panic attacks, the world is transforming how it generates energy, transports people and things, designs buildings, and grows food. To stay hopeful and motivated, we need to force our brains to read stories about climate progress. To that end ...

## Shove this good news in your brain folds

***Om nom nom.***

**To reach net zero by 2050, every country needs to cut emissions by 50% below 2005 levels by 2030. How are we doing?**



- **In the last two years, the U.S. passed laws** that provide \$514 billion to incentivize industry and consumers to electrify everything and power it all with renewable energy. Together the laws are expected to reduce emissions by about 40%.
- **Now the EPA is moving on aggressive new rules** that will bring us the rest of the way to 50% by tackling America's top two sources of climate pollution—transportation and energy.
- **State of play:** Many of these rules are the strongest ever proposed by the U.S., made possible by funding through the climate laws recently passed by Congress. It's almost like the people in charge know what needs to be done and are doing it.

## Behold the rules that will:



- **Limit tailpipe emissions** for cars, SUVs, pick-ups, and heavy-duty trucks.
- **Prohibit smokestacks** from causing smog across state lines.
- **Eliminate** 70% of **mercury and other toxics** from coal plants.
- **Strengthen** standards for lethal **soot pollution**.
- **Cut methane leaks** from 3 million miles of pipeline.
- **And the doozy:** Require most **fossil fuel power plants** to cut greenhouse gas pollution by 90% by 2040, or shut down. This rule alone would prevent 1,300 premature deaths, 800+ hospital visits, and 300k+ asthma attacks in 2030.

## And that's not all:



**Businesses are busy too:** Check out some groundbreaking climate solutions in the Future Forward [documentary series](#) presented by [The Climate Pledge](#), a promise from 250+ companies to reach net zero by 2040. No Statues of Liberties were harmed while filming.

**Air pollution from producing oil and gas costs** about **\$77B per year**, and burning it caused about **1 in 5 deaths** worldwide in 2018. It also increases the risk for [Alzheimer's](#), heart and lung disease, poor birth outcomes, and more. So every smidgeon of fossil fuels left in the ground means improved health for our bodies and our planet.

## More on climate and health



**Every heat death is preventable:** As part of our work with [frontline health clinics](#), we teamed up with Climate Central to send heat alerts to healthcare providers before dangerous heat is expected in their area, directing them to our [toolkit](#) we created with AmeriCares to help their patients with [diabetes](#), [asthma](#), [MS](#), [mental health disorders](#), and more. This project is so cool that it was just covered in [The New York Times](#).

**Climate, Health, and Equity:** [Watch a recap](#) of the Harvard Chan School's symposium with leading researchers and policy makers on climate change and health, and [read](#) some of the highlights with Kari Nadeau, our Interim Director, and Gaurab Basu, our Health Equity Fellow.

**Join students, clinicians, scientists, and public health professionals** at the [Climate and Health 2023 Conference](#) on October 21-22 to discuss health adaptation and climate mitigation strategies. Our Climate MD Program Lead [Dr. Caleb Dresser](#) and [Fellow Dr. Kimberly Humphrey](#) are among the organizers.



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