

# Climate Change

## and Rhode Island

Fact Sheet #4

## RISING ENERGY COSTS & THE SOLUTION THAT COULD SAVE OVER \$700,000,000

Rising Energy Prices...Warmer Air and Ocean Temperatures...Rising Sea Levels...What Do These Things have in Common?

They are all signs of our growing reliance on fossil fuels. The burning of fossil fuels – oil, coal and gas – releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that blankets the earth, trapping heat and causing global warming. Every time we drive a car, flip a switch or turn on the heat, we release carbon dioxide, raise demand for energy and drive energy prices up. The exact effects of global warming pollution differ from place to place, but tighter fuel supplies, higher prices for fuel and electricity and changing long term weather patterns are already affecting our health, our economic well-being and our quality of life.

### Climate Change in Rhode Island

It's gotten warmer and wetter in Rhode Island over the last 50 to 100 years. Climate change is a major concern for Rhode Islanders because of its potential adverse impacts through flooding in coastal areas, saltwater contamination of drinking water, more frequent and severe storms, and damage to local crops and forests. Higher temperatures and wetter weather can also increase heat-related illness and death, increase ground-level ozone that causes breathing problems in healthy people, and trigger asthma attacks in sensitive individuals. See *Climate Change and Rhode Island Fact Sheet #1: Should We Worry?* to learn how climate change will affect Rhode Island.

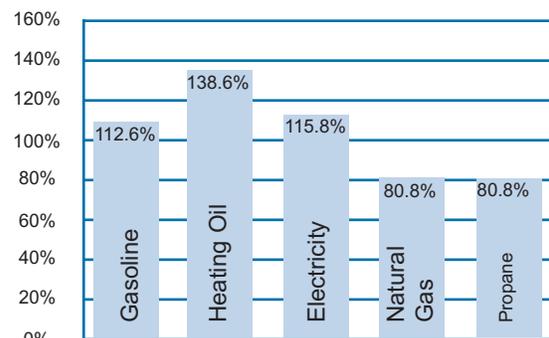
### Energy Demand and Costs are Rising, Supplies are Tightening

Declining worldwide fuel supplies and growing demands from developing nations like China and India are driving increases in energy prices. Costs for heat, electricity and gasoline all went up sharply between 2000 and 2005. There's no relief in sight, unless we change our fuel mix and energy consumption.

As more household money is spent on electricity, heating, and cooling, Rhode Islanders have fewer dollars to spend on other things. The impact is especially hard on low-income households that already spend most of their income on necessities like food, rent and utilities.

Rising energy costs impact local businesses, too. Businesses must spend more for energy to run their operations and may lose revenue when customers have less to spend. Expenses for low income heating assistance and for energy to run government facilities are also up, straining public budgets.

**Rising Energy Costs in Rhode Island**  
Percent Change 2000 - 2005



Energy costs have risen dramatically in Rhode Island since 2000. Sources: EIA and RIPUC.



Rhode Island hopes to spur wider use of renewable energy technologies. Left, a photovoltaic system provides solar power to Whole Foods Market in Providence, RI. Right, a wind turbine on Block Island provides power to a home. The State's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards Law will require electricity suppliers to purchase 16% of Rhode Island's energy from clean, renewable sources by 2020.

## The Solution: Smart Energy Choices!

Smart energy choices can begin to change these trends. Increasing the use of renewable energy and energy efficient equipment and materials over the next fifteen years can reduce demand for fossil fuel and new utility plants, **save Rhode Islanders over \$700,000,000** on energy costs, cut our carbon dioxide releases by one quarter from 4 million to 3 million tons, and reduce other air pollution. For more information about the 52 ways Rhode Island can achieve these savings, see the *2001 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Action Plan*.

You can do your part as well. There are many ways to be more energy efficient. See *Climate Change and Rhode Island Fact Sheet # 3: Take Action!* for specific ideas and actions on how to save energy. Most of these ideas can also save you money.

You may also want to purchase green power. You can buy green power from companies doing business in Rhode Island, without leaving your current utility. Your purchase will support development and generation of clean and renewable energy. This program is available to all residential and small business customers in Rhode Island except Block Island and Pascoag Utility District. For more information, visit [www.cleanenergyri.com](http://www.cleanenergyri.com).

If you are interested in a clean energy system for your home, the Rhode Island Renewable Energy Funds has rebate and incentive programs to help homeowners, businesses and institutions choose and purchase clean energy systems, such as wind turbines and solar photovoltaic ("PV") systems and electricity products. Visit the State Energy Office website for more information at [www.riseo.ri.gov](http://www.riseo.ri.gov).



Solar panels on this house in Westerly make it nearly energy independent. Photo courtesy of SolarWrights.

## RHODE ISLAND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSORTIUM

235 PROMENADE STREET • PROVIDENCE, RI 02908 • (401) 222-3434 • [WWW.DEM.RI.GOV/CLIMATE](http://WWW.DEM.RI.GOV/CLIMATE)

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