By: DAVID J. COX
Past President
National Insulation Association

It's only an increase of 2.7 degrees

NIA National Insulation Association®
REDUCE EMISSIONS FASTER WITH INSULATION™

Like many Americans this time of year, I am fighting the flu and have a fever — normally defined as a temperature above 98.6°F. I suspect most of us feel bad if we hit a temperature of 100°F and really bad if we hit 101°F. I think many of us know from experience when we are running a temperature before we even get out the thermometer. I find it amazing that a small increase of 2.7°F causes my body temperature to reach 101.3°F, which puts me to bed and makes me reach for Tylenol. But it's only an increase of 2.7 degrees.

This seemingly small difference in temperature came to mind because I just read that 2023 was by far the warmest year on Earth in the last 150 years. And the Earth didn't just set a record — it smashed the old one from 2016. It started when June 2023 was documented as the warmest June on record, and then every month thereafter set a record all the way up to December. The European Climate Monitor noted that average temperatures worldwide in 2023 were 2.66°F higher than they were in the second half of the 19th century.

In February 2021, the U.S. reentered the 2015 Paris Agreement where nations agreed to limit global warming to 2.7°F compared to preindustrial levels. In March 2021, the U.S. submitted a GHG target of 50–52% below 2005 levels by 2030. This is why you see many companies set GHG reductions tied to 2030. The key to remember is that regardless of one's stance on global warming, countries have agreed that a 2.7°F reduction is the goal and are taking steps to hit it. It seems small in absolute terms, but as we can see in our bodies, 2.7°F can make a huge difference. If Earth's temperature continues to rise, its reaction may be a lot stronger than reaching for Tylenol.

The bad news is that the world is not on track to reach the Paris Agreement goals. A slow approach to curbing emissions is no longer an option. The international community is falling far short of the Paris goals as reflected by strong words from UN Secretary General António Guterres. "We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator."

When I was National Insulation Association President, I said, "Nothing big in mankind has happened without intent. It's clear to me the sustainable energy and carbon emissions reduction train has left the station, and our mechanical insulation industry has a good seat." If net zero isn't achieved at that point, companies will make up the remainder through carbon offsets like carbon sequestration. Offsets are fine, but the reality is the world needs to cut emissions. It needs to turn to something that will stop emissions from ever entering the atmosphere in the first place, like insulation. All insulation is good. Readers, for your businesses, you should look at mechanical insulation to reduce the amount of energy needed to conduct your processes and, therefore, you will naturally reduce the emissions that are produced — and save money in the process.

The cheapest form of energy is the energy you don't use in the first place. Insulation is all about the business of running more efficiently and reducing energy consumption; it's the practical application you can implement in any location. The insulation sector remains focused on ways to save money and energy, protect people and equipment and reduce corrosion and mold. If you want to save energy, insulation will do that. It will also provide acoustical benefits, protect pipes from freezing or dripping and support fire and life safety.

For higher temperatures, mechanical insulation provides almost instantaneous, high-impact benefits as it reduces energy usage faster. As previously reported, adding two inches of fiberglass pipe insulation to a bare four inches of steel pipe running at 350°F can save 2,309 pounds of CO_2 per lineal foot per year. How many feet of pipe are in Texas or Louisiana? How much money would each plant save? What is the potential for reducing the release of CO_2 into the environment? Let's start solving the problem by reducing the emissions quickly, easily and to each company's benefit. Together we can use insulation in residential, commercial and industrial applications in the U.S. and globally to cut emissions and make the 2.7°F impact the Paris Accords have set.

For more information, visit insulation.org. ●