



To Infinity and Beyond!

The last few weeks have seen a dizzying amount of news surrounding climate change and carbon emissions—especially as the United States and other countries convened for an Earth Day Leaders’ Summit on Climate. The famous line by Buzz Lightyear in the movie *Toy Story* came to my

mind as I tried to make sense of all I have been reading. What does all this mean? What actions should we be taking as a result? And most importantly, what impacts does this have on our mechanical and industrial insulation industry? What are these goals, really? Are they a pledge, an accord, a projection, a commitment, a target, or a binding agreement? No matter what you call the effort, nothing big that mankind has accomplished has happened without intent. And it is clear to me that the sustainable energy and carbon emissions reduction train has left the station—and our mechanical insulation industry has a good seat.

Many countries and businesses are making carbon greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions goals for the end of this decade to 2050—some of which I mentioned in my article in the April 2021 issue of *Insulation Outlook*. One goal is net zero carbon emissions—a path that starts with companies reducing emissions as much as possible through conservation and new technologies; and if they have not reached net zero at a stated point, then they make up the rest through carbon offsets such as carbon sequestration. To give you an idea of the realities of a lower carbon future, during its Investor Day event on March 3, 2021, ExxonMobil estimated that carbon capture sequestration will be a \$2 trillion market by 2040. They also estimate hydrogen’s time has finally come and will result in a \$1 trillion market. (Find out more at <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/-/media/Global/Files/investor-relations/analyst-meetings/2021-ExxonMobil-Investor-Day.pdf>.) Speaking of hydrogen, Long Ridge Energy Combined Cycle Center, already under construction in Hannibal, Ohio, has plans to run on carbon-free, green hydrogen. According to the Long Ridge, it will be “the first purpose-built hydrogen-burning power plant in the United States” and the first in the world to blend hydrogen in a GE gas turbine initially, with the capability to progress to 100% hydrogen eventually. Each of these trends will have an impact on insulation, and I will continue to update you on them in future messages.

2050 seems like infinity to me. That is 30 years from now. But 30 years past does not seem that long ago. (I remember the ‘90s well!) Everything seems to move faster these days. Look how quickly things have changed: President Obama’s administration set a goal to reduce carbon emissions up to 28% below 2005 levels by 2025. In late April, President Biden announced a new, economy-wide net GHG pollution target for the United States to achieve by 2030: 50–52% percent reduction of 2005 levels. Another goal is to reach net zero emissions (economy wide) by 2050 to help limit global warming to 1.5°C. These goals are on top of President Biden’s existing goal to create a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035.

So back to my question of what does this mean to us in the mechanical insulation industry? We can look at New York City for some insight. The New York City Building Congress just issued a great report on how its construction industry can help the city reduce GHG emissions (see www.buildingcongress.com/uploads/Net_Zero_BTFFNY_v8.pdf). The report states that “New York City and State have committed to carbon neutrality by 2050 with the City placing particular focus on the building sector. Compared to the rest of the country, where transportation accounts for the majority of GHG emissions, New York City’s approximately one million buildings contribute over 70 percent of citywide emissions.” Certainly, insulation will play a part in this effort. Similarly, the Biden administration stated that the United States can create good-paying jobs while cutting emissions and energy costs by supporting energy-efficiency upgrades, electrification in buildings, and the adoption of modern energy codes for new buildings.

Time passes by quickly, as we all know. Fast forward 30 years: I am excited at what I predict for our industry. As I say, the cheapest form of energy is the energy you don’t use in the first place. And reducing energy use is what insulation does! That alone puts our industry at the front of the carbon emissions reduction train, ahead of many other technologies.

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P.S. Keep sending in your *Insulation Outlook* selfies to editor@insulation.org and use #NIAmeets on social media.