

Claire Richards

My name is Claire Richards and I live in Spokane Washington. I'm a nurse scientist, a professor of nursing and a member of the Washington physicians for social responsibility. I am also a mother of a four-year-old. My son was born in Seattle and we always imagined that he would grow up in the Pacific Northwest and that we would make this our home.

My son has only known one summer that was free of wildfire smoke. This last year in Spokane, the smoke reached unprecedented levels of hazardous air quality. We did not go outside for a week. Even with three high quality filters indoors, we could still smell the smoke inside. Even staying inside, I felt so crummy that I worried I was sick with COVID. Many people don't even have filters at all or were forced to work outside, and this is a major issue of health equity.

Many other low and middle income countries in the world are unfairly suffering even worse impacts that we are. What kind of world did I bring my son into in which we need to live in a bunker for him to be safe? Why don't the lives of children all over the world matter too? The recurrent wildfire smoke has caused me significant anxiety, restlessness, and despair about the future.

All I can conclude is that children and those who love them are simply expendable to our state's institutions and leaders. If they can only continue to extract and process fossil fuels, what is causing the world to become unlivable? The Lancet countdown concluded that the life of every child born today will be profoundly affected by climate change with populations around the world, increasingly facing extremes of weather, food and water insecurity.

Without accelerated intervention, this new era will come to define the health of people at every stage of their lives. When we look at what the science says about climate impacts, we know that wildfires will increase. It's a fairy tale to describe a staggering increase and create greenhouse gas emissions as a decrease in emissions or a flattening of a curve only because it's being compared to a steep and unrelenting carbon permissions. Thank you.