

Hi everyone, my name is Kyla and I teach environmental policy at Queen's.

5 years ago, I moved to Kingston from Sydney, Australia. I had been in Australia for 10 years, and I absolutely loved it. The people, the wildlife, the lack of snow to shovel, I loved all of it. I could have happily lived there forever. But in the last few years that I was there it was becoming pretty obvious to me, and it would have been obvious even if I wasn't someone who constantly thinks about the climate crisis, that Australia was not going to be a safe place for my family in the long term. In the summer, temperatures in Sydney's outer suburbs were getting close to 50 degrees Celsius. And of course, there was always the threat of wildfires. In comparison, Canada seemed like a really safe bet. Lower temperatures to start out with, lots of freshwater. My kids will be safe there, I thought.

Just over a year after I left, Australia experienced an absolutely devastating fire season in which fires burnt an estimated 243,000 square kilometres, destroyed over 3,000 buildings, killed at least 34 people and killed or harmed some 3 billion animals. I was heartbroken for my friends and for my adopted country. But I counted my blessings too, because I was safe and most importantly my kids were safe.

But of course, that feeling of safety was temporary and always a bit of a delusion that I used to protect myself from having to really come to terms with the reality that nowhere is safe anymore. You can't move away from the climate crisis, I guess unless you are Elon Musk and you can build a spaceship to go to Mars – but who wants to do that? Especially if he is going to be there!

But if I was deluded about being able to hide from the crisis before earlier this month, I certainly am not anymore. The smoke that we experienced here in Kingston put me out of commission for a few days with blinding headaches. And my kids were boarded up inside their primary school, unable to go outside for recess or lunch.

Now I know that on the scale of climate impacts experienced by different people around the world, this is extremely mild. And compared to what some people in Kingston experience during the smoke, my complaints are minor. I am keenly aware of how privileged I am – I was able to stay indoors with a HEPA filter running. I can't imagine what it is like for people with no options to filter their air or no home at all to shelter in.

Nevertheless, it really hit me psychologically, like a brick wall. And not just because it was so impossible for me to ignore, I mean the sun was pink, but also because so many people around me seemed to just accept it. Like this was ok, maybe not normal, but kind of inevitable.

If I can leave you with one message today, let it be this. Nothing about anything that is happening right now was inevitable. This isn't fate. This isn't the price we have to pay for having a civilization.

Canada is on fire because a very small group of people made choices. They chose to continue to profit from selling a product, even though they knew that product threatened the future of all life on earth. They chose to lie and manipulate and disinform the public so that they could keep selling this product. They even convinced governments, including Canada's, to subsidize the production and consumption of this product to the tune of billions and billions of dollars a year.

That product is fossil fuels. Coal. Oil. And Gas – don't let anyone tell you that gas is a bridge fuel, burning gas can be worse in some cases than coal. These fossil fuels are killing the planet and fossil fuel executives – not the workers, the CEOs – are to blame. So are the bank executives – especially David McKay, the head of RBC, the biggest funder of fossil fuel projects, not just in Canada, but in the world.

Now these are very powerful people – they have a lot of money, they have a lot of friends in government. But there is one thing that scares them. Does anyone want to guess what that is? They are scared that the people, all of you, are going to find out what they have done and are going to get very, very angry.

Are you angry?

I want you to be angry and I want you to talk to your friends and family and make sure that they are angry too. And then I want you to channel that anger into constructive action. That can take many different forms and I highly recommend working with one of the amazing groups that has organized this event today because we are all more powerful when we work together.

We know what we are asking for –

1. An end to fossil fuel subsidies, why should our taxpayer dollars be propping up the industry executives and shareholders who have tried to steal our children's future?
2. A hard cap on emissions from the fossil fuel industry and no new fossil fuel projects, because just getting oil out of the ground is the largest source of emissions in this country.
3. A just transition, so that the everyday workers in the fossil fuel industry are not left behind as we move to cleaner forms of energy. And beyond the fossil fuel industry we also need to take care of the most vulnerable members of our society because when there is heat or smoke or floods, it is those people who face the worst impacts even though they are often the least responsible for creating the problem.

Everything we need to make all of this happen already exists – we don't need to wait for new technologies, and we don't need to dither because we think that acting is going to hurt the economy. We owe it to our children and our grandchildren and every generation that comes afterward to throw everything we have at this crisis because everyone deserves to live in a community and on a planet where they feel safe.