

[Sample Article #2 for station program guides]

An interview with Claire Schoen
Producer/Director of
RISE: Climate Change and Coastal Communities.

What is this series about?

There's a lot of hard work being done to limit the greenhouse gases that are creating climate change. But we have passed a tipping point. There are some effects of climate change that we can no longer halt. And we have to face that fact. Even if we could completely stop the release of CO₂, right now, there is already so much greenhouse gas in the atmosphere that the effects will last hundreds of years. This is going to dramatically change the way we live.

One of the effects that we can still limit, but no longer halt, is sea level rise. Extreme weather conditions are another effect of climate change, that we are seeing more and more. The number and size of tornadoes, hurricanes, storms and droughts are increasing across the country.

The *RISE* series explores the impacts of these changes on people who are living in close proximity to the water. Coastal flooding will continue to increase from sea level rise and bigger storms, which cause bigger ocean waves. And people living near interior waters, like rivers, will also be affected because of greater storms.

That's the background of *RISE*. But what's really interesting to me, and the true focus of this project, are the people and their stories. What does all of this mean for individuals, families, and communities? While it's important to understand the science of climate change, what is really compelling is how people are affected and how they deal with the very real challenges they're faced with.

What inspired you about this topic?

The world is full of problems. But climate change is on a completely different level than the rest of them. If we don't figure this one out, every other problem that human beings face – war, famine, immigration – won't matter, because climate change will alter the planet so dramatically.

Although I have produced media on a wide range of subjects over the last thirty years, the one thing that I keep coming back to is environmental education. In the past decade that has meant trying to educate people about climate change and inspiring them to get involved and take action.

That's the big picture. But I have a more personal motivation as well. I live by one of the most incredible bodies of water on the planet. The San Francisco Bay is still – with everything we've done to it over the decades – one of the most biologically diverse bodies of water in the Americas, and the largest estuary. I've been living along the San Francisco Bay's shores for decades, but I actually knew very little about it. So this project was a wonderful opportunity for me to educate myself about the unique natural features of the Bay.

There has been a lot of media attention lately on climate change and sea level rise. How is *RISE: Climate Change and Coastal Communities* unique? How does it contribute to our understanding of the affects of climate change?

There is a lot of available information about climate change, if you choose to look for it. It's in the newspapers, and there are countless research documents and articles. I think *RISE* moves the conversation a step further by putting a human face on the issue. This isn't about statistics. It's about people. For example, Chuey Cazares has lived all his life in a little town by the edge of the water. Things are going to change for him and his family. And they are going to change in unexpected ways. So by talking about how this is hitting home to Chuey and to all of us, *RISE* personalizes the subject. Hopefully this will make listeners care and want to do something about it.

Also, people are talking about sea level rise and climate disruption and how we are going to stop it, but there is still very little conversation about adaptation. There are these two big concepts that scientists throw around – “mitigation” and “adaptation.” Mitigation is the idea of stopping climate change and its impacts, as much as possible, by reducing the amount of greenhouse gases we emit. Adaptation is recognizing that it's too late to stop all of the effects. The costs to adapt now are large. But the long term, financial and life costs of waiting until we have no choice are huge. As Will Travis says in the piece, you can fix your roof now in the dry season, or you can wait 'til it rains and there is much more damage and expense involved. People are going to suffer if we don't act soon. The *RISE* series helps move the discussion of climate change to include this concept of adaptation.

How did the process of creating this series influence how you think about climate change?

I hope that through work like *RISE* people will start turning the titanic around – it's a slow turn. People need to start the conversation. And then hopefully we will have enough time to deal with the issues. As one of the scientists in the piece, Healy Hamilton, says, we need to stop creating climate change now, or we may not be able to adapt to it's effects in the future. Though we can no longer stop all the impacts of climate change, we still have time to prevent the worst effects. I've realized, through producing *RISE* that our children could be living in a very different world if we don't start doing something about the problem now.

Claire Schoen has been creating award-winning documentaries in radio, film and video for over 25 years.