WORKSHOP · WED, OCT 14 · 2:30-3:30 PM

Climate Change, Mental Health, and Resilience in Mountain Communities

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Climate work carries an emotional load that burns people out, and repeated disasters leave mountain towns little time to recover. A mayor, a ski area sustainability lead, a nonprofit educator and a town sustainability manager shared how they cope and what local governments can do for staff and residents.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Name the feeling instead of turning away.** Being honest about climate anxiety makes it manageable. Charlotte Lin left climate work for a few years earlier in her career; naming it is what let her come back.
2. **Set a news limit and find your people.** Know when you have hit your capacity for bad news. Virtual climate cafes and peer teams build belonging, especially for people who work alone or remotely.
3. **Destigmatize mental health first.** Before climate distress, communities need basic mental health infrastructure. Eagle County built its system after a teen suicide; employees now get free therapy sessions.
4. **Wellness builds sustainability culture.** Arapahoe Basin's employee wellness group started with Canva flyers and craft nights. Staff who feel at home and trust you are more willing to compost and carpool.
5. **Community gatherings are resilience.** During a wildfire three miles away, Ridgway kept its July concert series going. Residents thanked the mayor for the sense of normalcy it brought back.

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Ask your local hospital and clinicians to take climate trainings.** Send them the APA-accredited list, including psychological first aid and disaster mental health.
- ☐ **Offer free therapy sessions to employees,** as Eagle County does, and push providers to train in climate distress.
- ☐ **Host climate cafes or grief and gratitude workshops,** as EcoAction Partners does for free at the local library. You do not need to be a therapist; refer when in doubt.
- ☐ **Bring the climate emotions wheel to outreach events.** Let people of all ages place a sticker on what they feel. Laminate it.
- ☐ **Get leaders trained in Mental Health First Aid.** Asking someone directly if they are thinking of hurting themselves lowers the risk, not raises it.
- ☐ **Model openness as an elected official.** Ridgway's mayor tells his own mental health story and urges other local leaders to do the same.

BY THE NUMBERS

12
Free therapy sessions for each Eagle County employee

~$40
Climate Psychology Alliance day-long climate cafe training

WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Even a strong mental health system may have no one trained in climate distress, and one-on-one therapy cannot scale after back-to-back disasters.
- ! Staff turnover resets trust. Progress on culture and buy-in is rarely linear.

RESOURCES

Climate Mental Health Network
climatementalhealth.net (climate emotions wheel)

Climate Psychology Alliance North America
climatepsychology.us

Mental Health First Aid
mentalhealthfirstaid.org

Building Hope Summit County
buildinghopesummit.org

Watch this and every SV26 session recording
mt2030.org/sv26sessions · Use the attendee password.

Summarized from the session recording and presenter slides. Figures are as presented; confirm with presenters before citing.

CONTACTS

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