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JCAN's Newton conference focuses on environmental activism

By Susie Davidson
Advocate correspondent



From the streets to the conference room.

The all-day learning fest LimmudBoston has spawned many worthy

offshoots. This weekend will feature the first Jewish climate change conference in Greater Boston and, perhaps, in [New England](#).

“From Uncertainty to Action: What You Can Do about Climate Change,” presented by the Jewish Climate Action Network (JCAN) this Sunday at [Hebrew College](#), will offer a full schedule of environmental programming. Sponsors include Hebrew College; the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL); Hazon; the Philadelphia-based Shalom Center; Shomrei Breishit: Rabbis and Cantors for the Earth; and Beantown Jewish Gardens.

Also sponsoring is Limmud [Boston](#) where it all began in 2013. Eli Gerzon, a social media and digital marketing consultant and coordinator for environmental organizations including 350.org, shared a Limmud table with Rabbi Katy Allen of the environmentally focused Metrowest congregation Ma’yan Tikvah-A Wellspring of [Hope](#). “We began to collect names of people interested in being part of a Boston-area Jewish organization of people concerned about climate change and the environment in general,” recalled Allen. A couple of phone conference calls followed, and JCAN was born. Last spring at the Boston Synagogue, JCAN featured Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center, an activist icon. A JCAN contingent also held a banner at the 400,000-strong People’s Climate March in [New York](#) last September. Allen said the group’s current focus is connecting green teams from various synagogues. “We have made connections with about a dozen synagogues so far, many of whom are doing great work,” she said. The conference will feature talks and sessions led by Waskow and Allen, as well as Rabbi Or Rose, founding director of [Hebrew College](#)’s Center for Global Judaism; State Rep. Frank I. Smizik; Jeff Steinfeld, an Emeritus Professor of Chemistry at M.I.T.; Rabbi Judy Weiss, co-leader of the Boston chapter of Citizens’ Climate Lobby; and Jim Nail, director of Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, among other religious and environmental leaders.

“We have drawn together some of the leading thinkers on multiple aspects of climate disruption and ways to mitigate it drawing on both the religious and the secular, the Jewish and the general spiritual,” said Andy Oram, a writer and editor at the technical publisher O’Reilly Media, who designed the conference website and brochure. “Plenaries and workshops will be at turns life-affirming, educational, and focused on how you can make change,” he said. Oram joined JCAN shortly after it was founded, has attended demonstrations including the People’s Climate March, and has discussed the Jewish context for addressing climate change at various synagogues.

The event will offer networking with like-minded people concerned about the planet, and opportunities to explore Jewish aspects of climate change.

Environmental organizations and businesses will make presentations, and teens and tweens can also participate in a special workshop on climate action.

“This will be some of most intense four hours attendees have ever spent. They’ll also come out knowing a great set of new people they’ll want to work with,” said Oram.

The Jewish Climate Action Network conference will be held at [Hebrew College, 160 Herrick Rd., Newton Centre](#), on Sunday, May 17, from 3-7 p.m. An optional donation of \$18 includes light refreshments. Student admission is free. Go to <http://www.jewishclimate.org/may-2015-conference.html>