

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Building Infrastructure for Resiliency

The environment is related to everything that we do. My program specifically focuses on environment and disaster management, so my program works on integrating environmental issues into risk reduction for disasters as well as recovery and reconstruction post disasters, the theory being that if we want to help communities respond and rebuild from an unfortunate event, they need to have a healthy ecosystem as part of that process if they're going to be a healthy, productive community into the future. We work on how to conceive and develop programs that minimize any negative environmental impacts from recovery and reconstruction, and maximize the benefits that a healthy environment can provide. For example, my work and my program is part of our adaptation and resilience team and so we are working on how do we live and grow and prosper under changing climatic conditions. The *Flood Green Guide* that we recently launched was developed at the request of the U.S. government, their Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, to help, from an international perspective, to think about how to use natural systems for flood risk reduction. The link between that work and infrastructure is that there's a lot of infrastructure damage that takes place in disasters and it needs to be rebuilt, and so there are opportunities to rebuild using environmentally responsible practices.

How to Get Engaged in Climate Solutions

I think as citizens of the U.S. and as part of the global community, we recognize that climate change is an issue that presents challenges to us all—both as individuals in our homes, in our families, in our communities, and professionals and how we do our work. We need to all be engaged in the process of thinking about and managing an approach to a changing climate. Ways that we can look around our own backyard, and our own neighborhood, and think about if the climate is changing, and we recognize that it is, what can I do within my own home to make more informed decisions about purchases that I make, to think about how I manage my yard and the water that flows through it, to try to work towards adapting to a changing climate. Then we have opportunities to engage at the local level around leadership in our communities and in our government systems to encourage and facilitate and catalyze recognition in our policies and in our legislation around managing in a changing climate. We can ask our local officials what is the adaptation plan for my county, for my state to prompt those who have decision-making authority to consider those issues and work to address them.

Optimistic About Climate Leadership

We don't necessarily point to any one storm or flood and say, "that's because of climate change." We know that that's not the case, but we do know that the trends are going up in terms of the number of extreme weather events that we are all facing. So in my work, in the people that I talk to around disaster response and risk reduction, there's a pretty clear appreciation for the way things are changing. It's concerning, and I feel like there's momentum in the right direction to look for: how do we deal with this reality, how do we manage it. That thinking, that leadership comes from all different places and walks of life. If there is a change in the direction

at the federal level, that means it's all the more important that we at our individual and at our state and our county levels, make sure we are doing more to step up our engagement. We see examples from different mayors and different cities who are being quite proactive on the climate issue, and corporations are stepping forward, and so we have to focus on where there's positive momentum and support that moving forward.

Optimizing Infrastructure: Smaller Footprint, Bigger Benefits

There is this thing called ecosystem services, benefits that people derive from the environment, and so infrastructure fits, in my view, right in the middle there of all of that because where roads go, how they're built, where dams are placed—there is an impact on the environment. There is the immediate impact which often times can be managed and mitigated but then there are the longer-term changes that take place. We're trying to take a systems approach to look at what is infrastructure, where does it go, how is it conceived, designed, developed and funded, and what are the environmental issues related to those intervention points and how can we support the aspirations that infrastructure presents for development, but at the same time minimize the environmental footprint and degradation while maximizing the benefits. That's a new line of work for us, so we have a lot to learn. We're bringing more engineers into our world to understand and engage in a successful and a positive way. In terms of the plans for infrastructure development around the world, it's quite significant. So, again we just see it as part of our conservation objective to understand and influence that type of work in a positive direction.

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