



Climate change reality

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NEWS FLASH: Global warming is real!

Actually, this is something we have know for quite some time but we are finally seeing those where previously silent finally admitting it. It must be real: even our politicians are saying so. Federal Liberal party leader Stéphane Dion won the leadership partly by taking a strong stand on global warming. Prime Minister Harper, quoted on CBC, recently confirmed that “these changes are occurring, they’re serious and we must act.” In BC, our own Premier Campbell paid specific attention to global warming in the recent Speech from the Throne.

The most recent, and most firmly worded reports on climate change come from a United Nations supported group, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Published in February 2007, the IPCC report follows up on a 2001 evaluation of climate change. The main difference in the 2007 edition? Certainty. Where the 2001 version said that human activity was likely to have an impact on global warming, the current edition now states that our involvement is “very likely” to have an impact. It also refines estimates, in most cases narrowing the range of possibilities.

More specifically, “Climate Change 2007”, the IPCC report, looks at changes, and the speed of change. Some of its conclusions point to accelerating changes. For example, warming seems to be accelerating. Eleven of the 12 years after 1995 are among the 12 hottest on record (since 1850 when we started tracking). The sea level went up an average of 3.1 mm a year during 1993-2003. May not sound like much, but it averaged only 1.8 mm annually during 1961-2003.

As the science has matured and resources improved and become better focussed on climate change, we

have been able to see some trends become clear. North and South America, and northern Europe are getting wetter; the Mediterranean and southern Africa are drier; droughts have become more intense and longer in the past 35 years; and summertime ice in the Arctic is decreasing by 7% a decade.

The IPCC report makes specific forecasts. It foresees that average worldwide temperatures will rise 1.8 to 4.0 degrees over the next century; sea level will rise by 18 to 59 cm in the same period.

The problem is that these changes will not be occurring in the same way all over the globe. Equatorial regions are likely to see lower temperature increases, thus making change less noticeable. But northern and polar regions might see increases approaching double digits. The implications for the globe are increasingly significant.

Without delving deeply (yet) into the process of global warming, perhaps we should consider some of the very real changes we can individually undertake today to reduce our impact on greenhouse gasses and

energy use. Consider these tidbits reported by CBC on its website:

- An idling engine releases twice as much exhaust fumes as a moving vehicle. Ten seconds of idling uses more fuel than restarting the engine.
- Burning wood in a conventional wood stove for nine hours emits as much particulate matter into the atmosphere as a certified stove does in 60 hours, or as a car travelling 18,000 km.

We cannot ignore the very real effects that climate changes will have on our health. After all, the physical environment is a significant “determinant of health.” That there implications of global warming are real, so too will be the implications for our health. Our next issue will look at how global warming occurs, and what some of the health effects will be (and already are).

Prime Minister Harper: “these changes are occurring, they’re serious and we must act.”