

Scientists urged to spread word on global warming

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[Global warming](#) is real, dangerous and ignored at great risk to the planet, a leading environmentalist told an audience of about 250 at last week's inaugural MIT Environmental Fellows Invitational Lecture.

Professor James Gustave Speth, Dean of Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, urged the scientific community to make its case to the public, which remains unconvinced of the crisis despite decades of first-rate science and policy analysis, he said.

Temperatures at the Arctic are already climbing, and there will be "irreparable damage in the decades ahead due to our negligence" in addressing climate change. U.S. policy makers and citizens must be spurred into action, Speth said in his talk, "Some Say by Fire: Climate Change and the American Response," held Wednesday, April 6.

"If I had a hundred million dollars," Speth said, "I think I'd put almost every penny of it into a public service advertising campaign...because we've got to reach lots of people quickly with this issue."

Speth is a founder of the World Resources Institute, co-founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council and former advisor to Presidents Carter and Clinton. His lecture was sponsored by the Laboratory for Energy and the Environment.

Climate-change research results and forecasts appear repeatedly in the scientific literature--some information "startling in its significance"--but Speth said good climate science rarely reaches the public in a "forceful

and meaningful way." Indeed, the mainstream American press persists in portraying global change as controversial and uncertain, he said.

There is now clear consensus among scientists that Earth's climate is being affected by the greenhouse gases generated by human activities. "We've seen these credible forecasts and credible warnings coming from the scientific community for the better part of three decades," Speth said. "But the influence of all the good science on policy and action has been puny compared with the need."

Noting MIT's phenomenal capacity to help tackle this critical global problem, Speth called for scientists at MIT and elsewhere to actively engage in public policy debates and issues. "Only the scientific community has the credibility to take the climate issue to the public and to the politicians," he said.

Given the lack of action at the federal level, he called for building a broad network of civic, scientific, environmental, religious, business and other communities to demand action and to take concrete steps to reduce emissions.

What can universities do? He recommended that they join together and commit to reducing their own emissions, which are often significant.

Source: MIT

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