

Climate Report Marks New Era in Global Warming Battle, Science Historian Says

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Tomorrow will be an important day in the history of humankind's battle against global warming, says a science historian at the American Institute of Physics. In a major report to be released on Friday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is expected to state that human activity is most likely the major contribution to Earth's global temperature rise since 1950.

"The scientific debate is over," said Spencer Weart, director of AIP's Center for History of Physics, in College Park, MD. "It now becomes an economic and political debate" over how to deal with the problem of global warming, he said.

This report is unprecedented in history, because it is expected to represent an overwhelming consensus by governments and by scientists on the human contribution to climate change, he said.

Weart, the author of "The Discovery of Global Warming" (Harvard University Press, 2003), has studied cultural attitudes to the problem. While humankind must make major changes to combat global warming's effects, there is reason for optimism, he said.

Human civilization now sees and responds to problems decades or centuries in advance, he points out. Half a century ago, in the wake of world wars and economic and political upheavals, most people scarcely tried to plan ten years ahead.

"We are at a new stage of sophistication," Weart said.

On the web:

The Discovery of Global Warming

aip.org/history/climate/index.html

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

www.ipcc.ch/

Timeline of global warming events

physicists.org/history/climate/timeline.htm

World Map of Sea Level Rise

flood.firetree.net/?ll=40.5000,-75.8500

Source: American Institute of Physics

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