

The need for fossil fuels will last for decades, according to BP's chief scientist

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The world is almost certainly going to remain hooked on fossil fuels—oil, coal, natural gas—for decades to come, despite our best efforts to cut back, the chief scientist for British Petroleum said during a recent campus talk.

Physicist Steven Koonin spoke to a crowd gathered at the Frances C. Arrillaga Alumni Center to hear the annual Drell Lecture. The event was hosted by the Center for International Security and Cooperation in the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies.

Koonin used a slide show, à la Al Gore, to make his points. The lines on his chart representing worldwide energy demands in coming decades went on a steady upward trajectory, the same years the world needs to cut back on carbon dioxide emissions to lessen the effects of global warming.

The industrialization of China and India will play a large role in driving the increasing energy demand, he said. China is opening a carbon-spewing coal plant at the rate of one a week, and India will increasingly turn to coal, he said.

Koonin said he is pushing BP research in biomass fuels as potential petroleum replacements, but that all the means of alternative energy such as wind and solar would likely be unable to halt the increasing use of fossil fuels.

Any country with an increasing per capita income is going to have a corresponding increase in energy demand, he said. Conservation measures may delay climate change, but will not prevent them, he said.

Koonin said consequences of global warming are real but unknown, and could range from "merely inconvenient to catastrophic."

Source: Stanford University

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