

Despite awareness of global warming Americans concerned more about local environment

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Last week, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared climate change a top international threat, and Al Gore urged politicians to get involved to fight global warming. Results from a recent survey conducted by a University of Missouri professor reveal that the U.S. public, while aware of the deteriorating global environment, is concerned predominantly with local and national environmental issues.

“The survey’s core result is that people care about their communities and express the desire to see government action taken toward local and national issues,” said David Konisky, a policy research scholar with the Institute of Public Policy. “People are hesitant to support efforts concerning global issues even though they believe that environmental quality is poorer at the global level than at the local and national level. This is surprising given the media attention that global warming has recently received and reflects the division of opinion about the severity of climate change.”

Konisky, an assistant professor in the Truman School of Public Affairs at MU, recently surveyed 1,000 adults concerning their attitudes about the environment. The survey polled respondents about their levels of concern for the environment and preferences for government action to address a wide set of environmental issues.

A strong majority of the public expressed general concern about the

environment. According to the survey, the top three issues that the public wants the government to address are protecting community drinking water, reducing pollution of U.S. rivers and lakes, and improving urban air pollution issues like smog. In the survey, global warming ranks eighth in importance.

“Americans are clearly most concerned about pollution issues that might affect their personal health, or the health of their families,” Konisky said.

Additionally, Konisky and his colleagues found that the best predictor of individuals’ environmental preferences is their political attributes. They examined the relationship between party identification and political ideology and support for action to address environmental problems.

“The survey reinforced the stark differences in people’s environmental attitudes, depending on their political leanings,” Konisky said.

“Democrats and political liberals clearly express more desire for governmental action to address environmental problems. Republicans and ideological conservatives are much less enthusiastic about further government intervention.”

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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