

Increased knowledge about global warming leads to apathy, study shows

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The more you know the less you care – at least that seems to be the case with global warming. A telephone survey of 1,093 Americans by two Texas A&M University political scientists and a former colleague indicates that trend, as explained in their recent article in the peer-reviewed journal *Risk Analysis*.

“More informed respondents both feel less personally responsible for global warming, and also show less concern for global warming,” states the article, titled “Personal Efficacy, the Information Environment, and Attitudes toward Global Warming and Climate Change in the USA.”

The study showed high levels of confidence in scientists among Americans led to a decreased sense of responsibility for global warming.

The diminished concern and sense of responsibility flies in the face of awareness campaigns about climate change, such as in the movies *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Ice Age: The Meltdown* and in the mainstream media’s escalating emphasis on the trend.

The research was conducted by Paul M. Kellstedt, a political science associate professor at Texas A&M; Arnold Vedlitz, Bob Bullock Chair in Government and Public Policy at Texas A&M’s George Bush School of Government and Public Service; and Sammy Zahran, formerly of Texas A&M and now an assistant professor of sociology at Colorado State University.

Kellstedt says the findings were a bit unexpected. The focus of the study, he says, was not to measure how informed or how uninformed Americans are about global warming, but to understand why some individuals who are more or less informed about it showed more or less concern.

“In that sense, we didn't really have expectations about how aware or unaware people were of global warming,” he says.

But, he adds, “The findings that the more informed respondents were less concerned about global warming, and that they felt less personally responsible for it, did surprise us. We expected just the opposite.

“The findings, while rather modest in magnitude – there are other variables we measured which had much larger effects on concern for global warming – were statistically quite robust, which is to say that they continued to appear regardless of how we modeled the data.”

Measuring knowledge about global warming is a tricky business, Kellstedt adds.

“That’s true of many other things we would like to measure in surveys, of course, especially things that might embarrass people (like ignorance) or that they might feel social pressure to avoid revealing (like prejudice),” he says.

“There are no industry standards, so to speak, for measuring knowledge about global warming. We opted for this straightforward measure and realize that other measures might produce different results.”

Now, for better or worse, scientists have to deal with the public’s abundant confidence in them. “But it cannot be comforting to the researchers in the scientific community that the more trust people have

in them as scientists, the less concerned they are about their findings,” the researchers conclude in their study.

Source: Texas A&M University

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