

# Mass media often failing in its coverage of global warming, says climate researcher

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"Business managers of media organizations, you are screwing up your responsibility by firing science and environment reporters who are frankly the only ones competent to do this," said climate researcher and policy analyst Stephen Schneider, in assessing the current state of media coverage of global warming and related issues.

Schneider, a coordinating lead author of chapter 19 in the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published in 2007, is calling for the news media to employ trained reporters in covering global warming. He will be discussing this and other issues in the symposium "Hot and Hotter: Media Coverage of Climate-Change Impacts, Policies, and Politics," which runs today at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago.

"Science is not politics. You can't just get two opposing viewpoints and think you've done due diligence. You've got to cover the multiple views and the relative credibility of each view," said Schneider, a senior fellow at Stanford's Woods Institute for the Environment. "But that is not usually the problem of the well-trained reporters, who understand what is credible.

"The problem is CNN just fired their science team. Why didn't they fire their economics team or their sports team?" "Why don't they send their general assignment reporters out to cover the Superbowl?" Schneider said. Researchers have to do their part, too, he said, by clearly explaining issues to reporters in succinct terms.

"I have arguments with some of my scientific colleagues, who think it is irresponsible to go out and talk when you can only get 5 seconds on the evening news, a couple of quotes in the New York Times, or five minutes in front of Congress," Schneider said.

"Well, you know what guys, that's just how it is," he said. "And if you think that you have a higher calling and you're not going to play the game because they don't give you the time to tell the whole story, then all it means is that you've passed the buck to others who know the topic less well."

"You have to have your elevator statement or people won't listen to you," Schneider said.

"What I always suggest is that scientists find metaphors that convey both urgency and uncertainty, so that you can get people's attention while at the same time not overstating the case," he said. "Then you have websites and backup articles and books where you can give the full story, but you have to have your sound bite and your op ed piece."

## **Environmental justice equals environmental effectiveness**

Schneider will also present a talk titled "A Scientific Perspective on Climate Change-Related Environmental Justice Issues," during the symposium "Environmental Justice and Climate Change," tomorrow at the AAAS meeting.

A disproportionate share of the effects of global warming are going to fall on developing nations, along with the poor and the elderly in wealthier nations, according to Schneider, who added that 75 percent of the accumulated greenhouse gases in the atmosphere came from 20

percent of the world's people, who live in wealthy countries.

"We've been using the atmosphere as a free sewer to dump our tailpipe and smokestack waste since the Victorian industrial revolution and now we tell the developing world, sorry, guys, the sewer's full," he said.

Telling the developing world they can't use energy resources they have at hand, such as coal and natural gas, won't have any effect unless we offer them alternatives that are cleaner, Schneider said. He said the U.S. has to accelerate the rate at which we are developing green energy sources such as solar and wind.

"The U.S. has to walk the walk if they expect to talk the talk and convince China and India and Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico - not to say anything about the even poorer countries with less skill and money - into following suit," he said. "We have to clean up our own act and then help them clean up theirs with technology and some resources."

Schneider said that we also have to work to mitigate the impacts on poor and elderly people in developed countries. Although it is impossible to lay any particular weather event at the feet of global warming, nonetheless one can get an idea of how the expected increase in extreme weather events will affect people by looking at the effects of storms such as Hurricane Katrina.

"Who died? The poor," he said.

The European heat wave in 2003 is another example, in which approximately 50,000 people died. "You know what they were primarily? Elderly. The elderly are much more vulnerable and they did not have proper adaptation measures," he said. "

"These events are going to happen dramatically more often than they

used to because of warming," Schneider said. "National governments have to consult local leaders in both the public and private sectors to figure out the most politically and cost effective solutions to help localities cope with increasing global warming".

Source: Stanford University

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