

# New initiative seeks to expand dialogue on the reality, risks and response to climate change

March 20 2014, by Kate Hawthorne Jeracki

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Climate scientists agree: Climate change is happening here and now. That is one of the key findings in a new report by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

"What We Know: The Reality, Risks and Response to Climate Change" assesses current climate science and potential impacts of a changing world, and outlines choices societies can make now to adapt and reduce risks for future generations. It is also the centerpiece of an AAAS initiative to expand the dialogue about climate change among policymakers and the general public, who are encouraged to think about the issue from a risk management perspective.

The AAS Climate Change Panel that produced "What We Know" was chaired by Nobel laureate Mario Molina, distinguished professor of chemistry and biochemistry at the University of California, San Diego and Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Diana Wall, University Distinguished Professor and director of Colorado State University's School of Global Environmental Sustainability, and James McCarthy, Alexander Agassiz Professor of Biological Oceanography at Harvard, co-chaired the panel, which included 10 [climate experts](#) from universities and institutes across the country, including MIT, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Stanford and Penn State.

"We consider it to be our responsibility as professionals to ensure, to the best of our ability, that people understand what we know: human-caused climate change is happening, we face risks of abrupt, unpredictable and potentially irreversible changes, and responding now will lower the risk and cost of taking action," they wrote in the 28-page report released March 18.

"My hope is that this report will help all of us - public, policy makers and scientists - realize that there is much we can do now, and by responding now we can reduce both the risk and the cost to [future generations](#)," Wall said.

## Key messages

The three key messages in "What We Know" are that:

1. Climate scientists agree: Climate change is happening here and now.
2. We are at risk of pushing our climate system toward abrupt, unpredictable and potentially irreversible changes with highly damaging impacts.
3. The sooner we act, the lower the risk and cost.

"People have responded successfully to other major environmental challenges such as acid rain and the ozone hole with benefits greater than costs," the report points out, "and scientists working with economists believe there are ways to manage the risks of climate change while balancing current and future economic prosperity."

The aim of the new AAAS initiative is to clarify and contextualize climate science so the public and decision-makers can be more adequately informed about the risks of [climate change](#) and possible ways to manage them.

"We're the largest general scientific society in the world, and therefore

we believe we have an obligation to inform the public and policymakers about what science is showing about any issue in modern life, and climate is a particularly pressing one," said Dr. Alan Leshner, CEO of AAAS. "As the voice of the scientific community, we need to share what we know and bring policymakers to the table to discuss how to deal with the issue."

**More information:** The report, "What We Know: The Reality, Risks and Response to Climate Change," is available online:

[whatweknow.aaas.org/wp-content... AAS-What-We-Know.pdf](http://whatweknow.aaas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/AAAS-What-We-Know.pdf)

Provided by Colorado State University

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