

Panel offers advice on how to combat climate-change "neoskepticism"

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A small panel of researchers has addressed what they suggest is a new threat to combating climate change—neoskepticism—where people believe climate change is real, but do not believe there is anything that

can be done about it, by penning a letter addressing adherents in a Policy Forum piece in the journal *Science*. The essayists, Paul Stern with the National Research Council, John Perkins with The Evergreen State College, Richard Sparks with the University of Illinois and Robert Knox with the University of California outline the ideas behind neoskepticism, explain why they think it is dangerous and then offer some ideas on how to address related issues or concerns.

The researchers begin by noting that in addition to deniers (who they suggest are typically out for political gain) there are now people they describe as neoskeptics—people who believe that using money to combat the problem of rising [global temperatures](#) due to human [greenhouse gas emissions](#) is a waste, in large part because scientists cannot prove one way or another what might happen. They suggest this new way people have of dealing with [climate change](#) needs to be addressed by the scientific community because it represents a new threat to undoing the movement to curb emissions.

The authors suggest that the crux of such arguments boils down to differences of opinion regarding a tipping point, and indeed if there even is one. But they note such arguments ignore the enormity of acting as if there is no reason to worry, pointing out that the longer we wait to curtail emissions the higher the risk of extreme negative environmental impacts. They suggest that the scientific community needs to start working under previously encountered uncertainty situations, such as when chemicals like DDT were outlawed. They further suggest that the way to prevent neoskepticism from creeping into the national debate is for the scientific community to find better ways to frame the debate. Instead of offering doom and gloom scenarios, they propose, why not offer ideas in ways that are familiar to people, such as comparing the risk of continuing on in our dangerous ways with people buying life insurance.

The authors conclude by acknowledging that offering better models to

the public to help combat efforts by those arguing against making efforts to combat climate change likely will not end skepticism, but they believe it just might help those in position to make decisions, make better ones.

More information: P. C. Stern et al, The challenge of climate-change neoskepticism, *Science* (2016). [DOI: 10.1126/science.aaf6675](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaf6675)

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