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CLIMATE SCIENCE

Climate Change Public Concern Is Rising Fast

by Staff Writers
Paris (AFP) Jan 25, 2007

Thirty years ago, global warming was an issue restricted to a handful of climatologists who, clamouring in the wilderness, warned that uncontrolled burning of fossil fuels would damage Earth's climate. Today, opinion polls in many countries say climate change is now a concern that citizens often place just after unemployment, terrorism or a similarly key issue of prosperity or survival.



illustration only

Climate change is ranked with highest importance in Europe, where sensitivity soared in 2003 after killer rainstorms drenched the east of the continent and a record-breaking heatwave gripped its west.

According to a poll published last November for the Financial Times among people in Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain, 86 percent of respondents believe humans are contributing to climate change and 45 percent fear it will become a threat to them or their families in their lifetimes.

More than 68 percent said they would either strongly or somewhat support restrictions on their behaviour to reduce the carbon emissions causing the problems -- and nearly half backed a charge on airline passengers to pay for environmental damage.

In Germany, environment is ranked second after employment. In France, nearly one in two of those questioned say climate change "is humanity's biggest challenge" in the 21st century. In Britain, where the government of Tony Blair has made fighting greenhouse gas a top issue, climate-related stories can be found on the front pages almost every day.

These include guides on how to calculate and modify one's "carbon footprint," as emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) are called, and on the value of carbon offsets -- donations to clean-energy projects that compensate for one's own pollution.

European corporations are outbidding each other to display their green credentials, announcing drives to boost energy efficiency or meet their needs from sustainable sources. Tesco, Britain's biggest retailer, last week said it would put "carbon cost" labels to help identify the true environmental cost of buying products.

In Japan, 90 percent of Japanese say that environmental criteria influence their lifestyle, according to an opinion poll last year.

In 2005, the Japanese government launched a media blitz to reduce carbon emissions, including the wearing of loose, casual clothing in the workplaces in the summer to ease the need for air conditioning. A total of 460,000 tonnes of



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carbon dioxide (CO₂) has been saved this way, equal to the emissions of a million households in one month, the government says.

In the United States, action against climate change has proliferated at the level of states and towns, while a widening swathe of US corporations is demanding mandatory caps on emissions -- an approach that is anathema to President George W. Bush.

A big spur for change at the grassroots has been the success of former vice president Al Gore's Oscar-nominated docufilm on climate change, "An Inconvenient Truth."

But there was also the record Atlantic storm season of 2005, which gave birth to Hurricane Katrina and bred fears -- which climate scientists themselves say cannot be confirmed at this point -- that such wild, destructive events will multiply in the future.

According to a survey conducted last year by Zogby International for the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), 74 percent of respondents said they were more convinced that global warming was now happening compared with two years earlier.

Public awareness about global warming is due for another jolt on February 2, when the UN's top scientific authority, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), issues its first update of knowledge in six years.

The report, whose three volumes will be issued by May, is expected to say that signs of climate change are already visible -- and Earth's climate system has poorly-understood triggers that could greatly amplify the problem.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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Paris (AFP) Jan 24, 2007

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