

# Opportunities for Pennsylvania Climate Change, Environmental and Energy Policy and Legislation

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# Outline

- **Basic Idea:**  
**Political Action Needs Public Support and Understanding**
- Public's Threat Perception of Climate Change is Moderate
- Energy-environment climate change related policies and legislation requires a broad-based, coordinated educational component as integral to strategy

# Basic Idea

- Public understanding of climate change risks undergirds public support for political action.

Challenge is a case of scientific and technological literacy.

# Risk Perception

- Americans perception of the climate change threat in general is MODERATE

(Range from 2-3 on 4 pt scale with  
1 low risk, 4 high risk)

(Leiserowitz. 2006. *Risk Analysis* 25(6))

National mail survey

# Questions

- General Concern
- Threats to Non-Human Nature
- Water Shortages
- Increased Chance of Disease
- Decreased Standard of Living
- Injuries/Illnesses
- Death

# Findings

- “Most Americans lack vivid, concrete, and personally relevant affective images of climate change”
- “One of the most important findings was . . . . There were no associations to the impacts of climate to human health.”
- “Few Americans associate global warming with extreme weather events, like heat waves, hurricanes, and droughts.”

# Beliefs of the Naysayers (7%)

- Global warming is natural (“A natural cycle that’s been going on for years”)
- Hype ( “Not as bad as the media portrays)
- Doubting the science ( “Junk science”)
- Flat denials of the problem (“A false theory”)
- Conspiracy theories (“Scientists making up some statistics for their job security”)

# Defining “Dangerous” (Leiserowitz conclusions)

- Key issue is what defines “dangerous”
- Lay interpretations differ from expert
- In large part, whoever controls the definition of “dangerous” climate change controls the rational solution to the problem.”

- "There's no agreement on what it is that constitutes a dangerous climate change," said Marburger, adding that the U.S. government spends \$2 billion a year on researching this and other climate change questions. "We know things like this are possible, but we don't have enough information to quantify the level of risk."

(Washington Post January 29, 2006, p. A1)

# Outlines of an Educational Strategy

- Baseline: What do Pennsylvanians know about climate change risks?
- What are the misconceptions?
- PA Climate Change Risk Awareness and Knowledge Act of 2006

# Outlines of Educational Strategy

An Act that provides educational resources specifically to address the effects of climate change on the Commonwealth and to insure that current and future generations are aware and knowledgeable of the short term and long term risks of climate change to their well-being and quality of life.

# Conclusion

- The clearer the climate change threat signal the greater the public support for political action
- A central task is educational

# References

- Special Issue of Defining Dangerous Climate Change *Risk Analysis* December 2005.
- Leiserowitz, Anthony A. 2005. American Risk Perceptions: Is Climate Change Dangerous? *Risk Analysis* 25(6):1433-1442.

# Information Source for Strategic Vision and Practical Direction

- **National Commission on  
Energy Policy (NCEP)**
- **[www.energycommission.org](http://www.energycommission.org)**









- Scenarios as a means to enhance public understanding and dialogue of climate change risks and alternative courses of action.
- “There is no silver bullet”

# Outlines of an Educational Strategy

- Tools of executive decision making have to be democratized
- Simulations and scenario building exercises
- CARA models
- Influence mental models
- Uncertainty and presumption
- Development of a common language
- Forums for dialogue
- Accessibility , Transparency, Simple but not simplistic