

# U.N. Warns Against Delay in Cutting Carbon Dioxide Emissions

By WILLIAM K. STEVENS

*New York Times (1923-Current file); Oct 25, 1995; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*  
pg. A13

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Delaying action to rein in emissions of heat-trapping atmospheric gases like carbon dioxide could increase the rate and magnitude of future climatic changes and make the world more vulnerable to costly and possibly irreversible damages, a United Nations scientific panel says in a new report.

Some economists have argued that the only cost-effective way to reduce emissions is to put the reduction off as long as possible, while others insist that doing so would merely push the burden onto future generations.

The new report, made public yesterday in Washington by a working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, says that while future technological advances might lower the cost of emissions reduction if action is delayed, deeper emissions cuts would be required in the end. Moreover, the scientists say that a delay in action could boost the damage from climate change and increase the cost of adapting to it.

And they say that if existing technologies for cutting fossil-fuel energy use are aggressively exploited through strong governmental policies, substantial emissions reduc-

tions can be achieved without big changes in life styles.

The report comes at a time when 142 countries that are parties to the 1992 climate treaty signed in Rio de Janeiro are negotiating reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases. The emissions come mainly from the burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil. The industrialized countries of the world have already pledged, as a first step, to cap the emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000.

The report also comes as Republicans in Congress are seeking to reduce by as much as 40 percent the

funds for the Clinton Administration's program to reach the 1990 cap.

The role of the intergovernmental panel, which consists of about 2,500 experts around the world, is to advise the treaty parties. An economics working group reported in Montreal 11 days ago that earlier action to cut emissions might relieve the burden on future generations by giving them more flexibility. The new report, from another working group, says that loss of this flexibility would force deeper emission cuts later on.

An average increase in global temperature of 1.5 to 6.3 degrees by the year 2100, predicted by a third work-

ing group, would cause a sea level rise of 6 to 37 inches by then and more in the following centuries, according to the report issued yesterday. Many low-lying coastal areas around the world could be inundated, the scientists say. An average rise of about 39 inches, they say, could place 70 million people at risk.

The panel also said climate change could produce, among other things, these consequences:

☛Bring an increase in heat waves, floods, droughts, fires and pest outbreaks in some regions.

☛Lead to the disappearance of entire forest types.

☛Make desert climates more extreme.

☛Cause a rise in the number of

heat-related deaths and illnesses.

☛Increase the range of vector-borne infectious diseases like malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever and viral encephalitis.

The report says that if existing technology were applied strictly, energy savings of about 25 percent could be achieved in homes, businesses and industrial plants during the next 30 years, and that greenhouse-gas reductions could be even larger.

It said energy use by motor vehicles could be cut by about a third during the same period by using efficient drive trains, light-weight materials and low-air-resistance design. Further reductions could come if vehicles were made smaller.

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