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Global warming scientist downplays fossil fuel threat

By MARK BENJAMIN

WASHINGTON, Aug. 17 -- A leading scientist considered to have been instrumental in sparking serious debate over global warming suggested this week that emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from burning fossil fuels are not the main culprit in global warming, and that the world should instead focus on reducing other pollutants, such as chlorofluorocarbons and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) to reduce the global warming threat.

Dr. James Hansen from the National Aeronautic & Space Administration's Center for Climate Systems Research this week argued that those other pollutants - and not CO₂ from burning oil and coal - are the real culprits in global warming. Hansen adds that reducing those emissions instead of CO₂ would eliminate many of the political hurdles that slow efforts to curb global warming. "We argue that global warming in recent decades has been driven mainly by non-CO₂ greenhouse gases such as chlorofluorocarbons and \$(NO_x\$), not by fossil fuel burning," he

Hansen stoked serious debate on global warming by calling on Congress to address the issue in landmark testimony delivered to Capitol Hill in 1988.

Hansen and a group of scientists this week released "Global Warming in the 21st Century: An Alternative Scenario," a publication from the National Academy of Sciences.

The article reflects a drastic departure from conventional methods environmentalists and many government officials say are needed to reduce global warming. They argue that CO₂ is the main villain, and that the way to reduce global warming is to reduce the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, which produce most CO₂.

The article was met with praise from industry officials who have long argued that the connection between CO₂ and global warming is tentative. "I would say that this is a very significant admission on \$(Hansen's\$) part," John Grasser, spokesperson for the National Mining Association said. "Carbon dioxide is most maligned in this debate."

Environmentalists have long argued that CO₂ is the main cause of global warming. At press time, environmentalists were still reviewing the new article.

But Hansen's arguments represent a relatively dramatic departure from the current status of the debate over global warming. The 1997 Kyoto protocol, for example, is based almost entirely on reductions of CO₂ and calls for signatory countries to reduce CO₂ emissions to 95 percent of 1990 levels by 2012. While the Clinton administration supports that treaty, they have yet to submit it to the Senate for ratification. Such a move would surely fail because Congress is concerned that developed nations would have to make serious reductions in CO₂ emissions that could cripple the economy while less-developed nations would not. The disagreement has stalled any progress on the protocol for years.

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