

BLINDING THE SCIENCE: INDUSTRY AND THE "CLIMATE SCEPTICS"

"The reason most Americans don't know what is happening to the climate is that the oil and coal industries have spent millions of dollars to persuade them that global warming isn't happening." - Ross Gelbspan "The Heat is On"

Negotiations on the Climate Convention have always been underpinned by strong scientific advice. At the centre of this is the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a core of 1500 scientists which draws on a wider group of 3000 scientists. The IPCC's Second Assessment, published at the end of 1995, came to some very strong conclusions: that the first signs of climate change were now evident and that human activity (from the burning of fossil fuels) had contributed to this.

The UN has its advisors. But so does industry. There is a tiny core of climate scientists who have been employed by the fossil fuel industry and front groups like the Global Climate Coalition to speak out against the IPCC scientists: the climate sceptics.

Pulitzer prize-winning American journalist Ross Gelbspan spent two years investigating the fossil fuel industry in the US and its employment of the climate sceptics.

"Over the last six years the coal and oil industries have spent millions of dollars to wage a propaganda campaign to downplay the threat of climate change. Much of that money has gone to amplifying the views of about half a dozen dissenting researchers, giving them a platform and level of credibility in the public arena that is grossly out of proportion to their influence in the scientific community," writes Gelbspan.

The climate lobby, he argues, has played on the journalistic need for a "balanced" story to insist to editors that their scientists' views get an airing.

"Unfortunately, most editors are too uninformed about climate science to resist. They would not accord to tobacco company scientists who dismiss the dangers of smoking the same weight that they accord to world-class lung specialists. But in the area of climate research, virtually no news story appears that does not feature prominently one of these few industry-sponsored scientific 'greenhouse sceptics'," states Gelbspan

These scientists, have come under increasing scrutiny over the past two years — so much so that the American Petroleum Institute (API), in its plans for a communication strategy aimed at undermining climate science, notes that it will use scientists who "will be individuals who do not have a long history of visibility and/or participation in the climate debate. Rather, this team will consist of new faces".

The "old faces" amongst the climate sceptics employed by industry include:

Robert Balling, Patrick Michaels, Fred S Singer, Richard Lindzen.

Michaels received more than \$165,000 in industry and private funding over 5 years.

Balling has received, either alone or with colleagues, nearly \$300,000 from coal and oil interests

Singer has received funding from Exxon, Shell, ARCO, Unocal and Sun Oil.

Lindzen has been a paid consultant for major oil and coal interests, charging \$2,500 a day.

For more information on the climate sceptics and their arguments go to www.greenpeace.org

