

World will end in 2 to 3 generations, 72 per cent of British Columbians fear

Quick and drastic action needed to curb global warming, poll told

Darah Hansen, Vancouver Sun

Published: Saturday, November 18, 2006

B.C. Nearly three-quarters of British Columbians believe life as we know it will end in another two or three generations unless drastic and immediate action is taken to curb global warming, according to the results of an exclusive Vancouver Sun poll.

The poll comes as world leaders meet in Nairobi to discuss climate change and what can -- and should -- be done to stop it.

The poll -- conducted Nov. 10-16 by Ipsos Reid -- also found that most B.C. residents give themselves an above-average grade when it comes to assessing their personal environmental performance, but fewer than 10 per cent of respondents say they are doing all they can to help reduce their environmental impact.

Roughly half (48 per cent) said they would be willing to pay more for gasoline to protect the environment -- the argument being that, as the price of gasoline rises, people are more likely to find alternatives to driving. Of those who are willing to pay more for gasoline, about half (46 per cent) said they would pay up to 10 per cent more, while 23 per cent said they would pay between 50 and 100 per cent more, the poll found.

The poll also found that 72 per cent of British Columbians agreed that every individual household should have a water meter, so that everyone pays for the water we consume.

The poll randomly sampled 300 adult B.C. residents, and is considered accurate to within plus or minus 5.6 per cent, 19 times out of 20. Pollster Kyle Braid said the results provide "a good snapshot" of the province on the issue of environmental action.

In particular, Braid noted that 72 per cent of poll respondents agreed they were "desperately concerned" over climate change and that "drastic" action is required right now in order to save mankind.

The figures exceed national poll results recorded by Ipsos Reid in September, which showed 63 per cent Canadians felt the same way when asked a similarly worded question.

Braid said the heightened awareness of environmental issues may be the result of increased media coverage of the topic, particularly as Canada has faced harsh criticism at the United Nations conference for failing to meet its Kyoto targets.



Iceberg floes in the bay in Kulusuk, Greenland, near the Arctic Circle. Scientists say global warming has an increasing effect on the Arctic region with glaciers shrinking, temperatures of the arctic waters warming, and permafrost softening, and that nations must take action.

Photograph by : John McConico,
Associated Press Files

Braid said 2006 marks the first time in 16 years that Canadians have put environmental concerns ahead of worries about health care, education and the economy.

The last time the environment topped our national concerns was in July, 1990 -- not long after scientists began sounding the warning bell on global warming. A period of recession, however, soon put an end to our green efforts, Braid said, and replaced with worries over taxes and the economy.

"A colleague of mine calls the environment the U-boat issue -- every once in a while it peeks up and moves to the top of the issues list, before it dips back under," Braid said.

Environmental advocate David Suzuki called the poll results "wonderful," and urged individual Canadians to "start screaming at our politicians" to effect the changes we need to stop climate change, both federally and provincially.

"Every year we delay, it becomes harder and more expensive for our children and our grandchildren to do something, and it really pisses me off to see the lack of leadership and vision and courage," he said.

"Thank God; if that poll means anything, it means the public is there . . . the awareness of global warming and concern about it is there . . . and they ought to be kicking and screaming for change."

"If 72 per cent of British Columbians are alarmed about this, then that is a huge kick in the ass for politicians," Suzuki said.

The Sun's poll comes on the heels of a survey conducted by Decima Research that found 26 per cent of respondents said the environment will be a key factor in their vote in the next election.

The Decima results suggested the federal Conservatives were much stronger among voters worried about the economy and taxes, with more than 40 per cent, while the NDP may be facing a serious threat from the Green party.

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