



# COMMUNICATING CLIMATE CHANGE

# FACT SHEET

## Why Communication Counts

Photo: Avaaz.org

The world's top climate scientists agree that human activities are forcing climate change at an extraordinary rate — with disastrous consequences if we fail to change course. The need has never been more urgent for individuals and governments to take strong action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution and to seize the opportunities created by that action.

But is that message getting through?

Recent research by the FrameWorks Institute shows that most Canadians don't understand the science of global warming. They don't know how it could affect their health, communities and livelihoods. That's a serious problem, because when people are confused or misinformed, they are more vulnerable to manipulation by spin.

*“The cultural models available to understand global warming lead to ineffective personal actions and support for ineffective policies, regardless of the level of personal commitment to environmental problems.”*

— Kempton, Boster and Hartley.  
*Environmental Values in American Culture.*

On the flip side, as Canadians grow to understand climate change — what's happening, why, and what we can do about it — they become more likely to support the policies and practices that are necessary to combat global warming.

In September 2009, concerned individuals from 134 countries took part in close to 2,700 events calling on world leaders to reach a fair, ambitious and binding climate agreement. (above)

One month later, more than 3,000 Canadians gathered on Parliament Hill — along with tens of thousands of others in 240 locations nation-wide — to pressure the federal government to act on climate change. (below)



Photo: Canadian Youth Climate Coalition

# Telling the Climate Story

## Getting the climate change message across depends on how the story is told — and who's listening

In its consultations, the FrameWorks Institute tested six different “values” — or reasons to take action on climate change. The values were:

- 1) **Innovation** — appealing to people's ability to find solutions to climate change through invention and investment;
- 2) **Stewardship** — considering the responsibility to carefully manage resources and leave the planet in better shape for future generations;
- 3) **Crisis** — emphasizing the documented evidence and the irreversible nature of the problem;
- 4) **Science** — affirming the scientific consensus on the evidence of rapid climate warming;
- 5) **Kyoto** — arguing that meeting Canada's commitments to this international climate change treaty is non-negotiable.

Focus group research by FrameWorks found that using the different values to communicate about climate change had the following impacts:

- 1) **Innovation** boosts support for policy, especially among males under 35. It had a significant appeal among university graduates and people who don't usually follow the media.
- 2) **Stewardship** decreased support for policy, and carried a negative connotation for men under 35, but appealed to women over 55. Talking about environmental stewardship seemed to increase pessimism and a sense of futility about fighting climate change.
- 3) **Crisis** also decreased policy support regardless of participants' engagement with the issues, and especially among young men and less-educated respondents.
- 4) **Science** increases support among women over 55, but reduces support among men and women under 35. It appeals most to residents of British Columbia, but is less motivating for Albertans and those living in Atlantic Canada, with both groups favouring references to innovation.
- 5) **Kyoto** only boosts policy support among those who already agree with that premise.

Adapted from: “Framing Global Warming in Canada.” FrameWorks Institute, December 2007.

### Canadian Perspectives on Environmental Leadership

In spring 2009, six months into the global economic downturn, more than 4,300 average Canadians and 1,000 “thought leaders” responded to an online survey measuring attitudes toward environmental issues and governance.

Perspectives on Climate Change	Thought Leaders	General Respondents
Governments and businesses need to make BOTH economic and environmental issues (such as climate change) top priorities, despite the economic crisis.	87%	67%
Climate change will likely have very serious impacts.	81%	72%
Canada should take stronger leadership on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and Canada's lack of action on curbing emissions is embarrassing.	84%	77%

Lack of government leadership was the top reason general respondents cited to explain why they don't behave more sustainably in their day-to-day lives. Thought leaders ranked government inaction second to the challenges of living and working in poorly designed cities and workplaces.

Adapted from: “Shared Values, Canadians and Sustainability.” Hoggan & Associates, Spring 2009. The survey of average Canadians was conducted by Mustel Group, and had a margin of error of +/- 1.48%, 19 times out of 20. The survey of thought leaders had a margin of error of +/-3.1%, 19 times out of 20.



Photo: AVAAZ.org

# Changing Attitudes on a Changing Environment

## Polls confirm that Canadians want action on climate change

Over the last year, Canadians have struggled through one of the worst global recessions in history. The economic downturn claimed thousands of jobs, swallowed retirement savings and turned anticipated profits into losses. Given the hardships many Canadians were facing, some people expected other priorities to overwhelm voters' concern about the environment — a leading issue in the 2008 federal election.

But that's not what the numbers showed.

In July 2009, Harris-Decima asked more than 1,000 Canadians where the environment ranked on their lists of concerns. The sample has a margin of error of 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

### And the Survey Says...

Three-quarters (74%) of respondents said the current focus on the environment is not going far enough. 73% also said they are making more of an effort to be environmentally conscious than they were a year ago, in spite of the recession.

**More than two-thirds (67%) of those asked said the environment should remain a top priority for policy-makers, even during tough economic times.**

Source: "In Spite of Recession, Environment Remains a High Priority." Harris-Decima, August 20, 2009.

A recent online survey of Canadians found that Quebecers are the most concerned about sustainability\*:

- 75% rank sustainability as a top or high-priority national goal
- 60% say adopting more sustainable practices would improve Canada's international competitiveness
- 69% say "environmental issues such as climate change" must remain a top priority for governments despite the economic downturn
- 55% cite lack of government action as the main reason they don't act more sustainably in their day-to-day lives

\*Sustainability was defined here as "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Source: "Shared Values, Canadians and Sustainability." Hoggan & Associates, Spring 2009.



## Key Terms and Concepts

**Base Year:** A reference point for greenhouse gas (GHG) emission targets. Canada's current target is to cut emissions 20% from the 2006 (base year) level by 2020. It is more common to use 1990 as a base year.

**Cap-and-Trade:** Capping the amount of GHGs that can be emitted into the atmosphere and allowing polluters to trade allowances issued within that limit puts a price on emissions. Polluters with rising emissions must purchase extra allowances. Those who reduce emissions can sell excess allowances.

**Conference of the Parties (COP):** The supreme decision-making body of the countries that ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The COP meets at annual UN climate conferences.

**Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):** The world authority on climate science and co-winner of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize. The IPCC was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environment Programme to conduct climate assessments for governments.

**Kyoto Protocol:** International agreement adopted in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, committing signatories in the industrialized world to reducing their combined GHG emissions by an average of 5% below 1990 levels from 2008 to 2012.

**Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF):** Forests and soils can absorb or produce GHGs, depending how they are managed. Close to one-fifth of global GHG emissions from human activities come from forests and soils.

**MRV:** The 2007 Bali Action Plan calls for GHG reduction efforts to be "measurable, reportable and verifiable." Certain MRV mechanisms are included in the Kyoto Protocol, but rigorous MRV standards will be a critical part of a post-2012 climate agreement.

**UN Framework Convention on Climate Change:** With the ultimate objective of preventing dangerous climate change, the "UNFCCC" treaty, opened for signature at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, challenged industrialized countries to initially return their emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

# Getting the Message Across: Talking Points

1. Canada is one of the world's top 10 global warming polluters.
2. Greenhouse gas pollution creates a heat-trapping blanket that surrounds our planet and strains the natural systems that sustain life. It comes mainly from burning fossil fuels such as coal and gasoline for energy.
3. It's time to stop relying on dirty energy sources and start building a future based on clean, secure and sustainable energy.
4. While Canada generates less than 2% of its electricity from wind and solar power, some European countries meet up to 20% of their national demand from wind and solar.
5. Canada needs to start investing in new clean energy expertise, and training workers to compete in the new global economy.
6. Global warming puts our children and grandchildren at risk and compromises their futures — but they can't yet vote for themselves. By reaching a strong global climate agreement, we have an opportunity to make them proud by protecting the air they breathe and the resources they need to live healthy lives.

Adapted from: "Climate Change and Copenhagen Message Memo." McAllister Opinion Research, October 2009.



Photo: courtesy of the White House

*"We cannot accept the growing threat posed by climate change, which could forever damage the world that we pass on to our children, sowing conflict and famine, destroying coastlines and emptying cities. And that's why all nations must now accept their share of responsibility for transforming the way that we use energy."*

*— U.S. President Barack Obama,  
upon winning the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize*

Despite the unprecedented threat of climate change, many people still doubt the science or question the economic case for action. Below are some common claims from the skeptics:

### **Claim: Scientists aren't sure.**

The world's most authoritative scientific bodies emphatically recognize the evidence and danger of human-caused climate change. The only uncertainty is how quickly change will occur — and the latest science shows it happening faster than anticipated.

### **Claim: Reducing emissions would cripple the economy.**

Inaction would be worse: one of the most reputable studies (the 2006 Stern Review) estimated that the "costs and risks" of uncontrolled climate change are equivalent to a loss in global GDP of at least 5% and up to 20 per cent or more, "now and forever." On the other hand, demand for clean energy technology creates a huge economic opportunity.

### **Claim: Warmer weather might be good for Canada.**

Climate change is normal, but geologic history shows that sudden warming shocks the earth's systems, causing rapid sea-level rise and mass extinctions. Average global warming of 2°C would result in serious impacts on Canadian ecosystems, infrastructure and the resource-based sectors of our economy.

Adapted from: Beck, Coby. "How to Talk to a Climate Skeptic." Grist Magazine ([www.grist.org](http://www.grist.org)), 2009.

## More Information

For in-depth reports, backgrounders and updates on the latest climate news and negotiations, go to [climate.pembina.org](http://climate.pembina.org).

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