

First survey of New Yorkers on climate change finds majority worried about impacts

A new survey of New Yorkers finds that most are convinced global warming is happening now and more should be done by key leaders to help New York City deal with climate change. The survey is the first-ever study of New Yorkers' opinions about global warming and was designed and funded by researchers at Columbia and Yale Universities, and led by the Center for Research on Environmental Decisions at Columbia.

The survey, conducted by Princeton Survey Research International, is based on English and Spanish telephone interviews with a representative sample of 1,000 adults living in New York City's five boroughs. The interviews took place from November 28 to December 16, 2007. The survey's key findings include:

- A large majority of New Yorkers are convinced that global warming is happening (78%), and of that number, 82 percent believe that global warming is caused mainly by human activities or caused equally by humans and natural changes.
- A majority of New Yorkers (60%) say they are personally worried about global warming. Further, 22 percent believe that global warming is already having dangerous impacts on the city while an additional 30 percent believe dangerous impacts are imminent within the next 10 years.
- Large majorities of New Yorkers believe that global warming will cause more heat waves (85%); energy blackouts (79%); worse storms, hurricanes and tornadoes (79%); increased rates of disease (72%); and flooding of subways, tunnels and airports (70%).
- Finally, a majority (69%) say it is likely that parts of New York City will need to be abandoned due to rising sea levels over the next 50 years.

"New Yorkers believe global warming is going to hit home hard and want their leaders to act," said Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Project on Climate Change (YPCC) and co-principal investigator at the Center for Research on Environmental Decisions (CRED) at Columbia University.

"Recent vivid and memorable media coverage of climate change impacts around the world and domestically have brought global warming onto the radar screen of the residents of New York, elevating it to a risk worth worrying about," said Elke Weber, co-director of CRED, professor of Psychology and the Jerome A. Chazen Professor of International Business at Columbia University.

According to recent studies, global warming is projected to have significant impacts on the city, which may lead to serious consequences for lives and livelihoods in the area. Regional summer temperatures are projected to increase 3.82 – 4.95°F (2.12 – 2.75°C) by the 2050s, and sea level in the region may rise nearly 12 inches by the 2020s and nearly 24 inches by the 2050s. Summer heat-related mortality could increase 55 percent by the 2020s and more than double by the 2050s.

In April 2007, Mayor Michael Bloomberg unveiled PlaNYC 2030, a long-term strategy to reduce New York City's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent and manage future population growth. This survey on New Yorkers' opinions on global warming also measured public support for several initiatives proposed by PlaNYC, including energy efficiency for buildings and congestion pricing. The survey shows that, in line with their concerns about climate change, large majorities of respondents say that Con Ed (82%), Governor Spitzer (75%), and Mayor Bloomberg (72%) should be doing more to address global warming.

“The results are noteworthy because they show New Yorkers support an aggressive climate policy agenda and are willing to pay to see it implemented,” said Steve Hammer, director of the Urban Energy Program at Columbia’s Center for Energy, Marine Transportation and Public Policy.

For example, the survey found that large majorities of New Yorkers support making buildings around the city more energy efficient. When asked who should pay for these improvements, a majority (60%) said that for new buildings, the city should require developers to pay; however, for existing buildings, a majority (58%) said that the city should help to pay. The survey also found that:

- 66 percent of New Yorkers support a \$2.50 surcharge on the average household’s monthly electric bill for a special fund to help make buildings more energy efficient and to support public education on energy use.

- 76 percent support a city subsidy to encourage building owners to replace old furnaces, water heaters, air conditioners, light bulbs, and insulation, even if the subsidy costs the average household \$5 a month more in higher taxes.

- 66 percent support the installation of solar panels on city-owned buildings, even if the electricity generated is significantly more expensive than what city government normally pays for its electricity.

New Yorkers were more divided on the Mayor’s congestion pricing plan to charge an \$8 fee to all motorists entering Manhattan below 86th Street between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. When told the city will use the revenue to improve the subway, train, and bus systems, 53 percent of the public supported the idea, while 42 percent opposed it.

New Yorkers are also willing to shoulder some of the responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The majority of respondents said they are willing to buy compact fluorescent light bulbs (71%), spend \$5 more a month for electricity produced from renewable energy sources (68%), make their views on global warming clear to politicians (67%), use less air conditioning (66%), and turn down their thermostat in the winter (60%).

Source: The Earth Institute at Columbia University

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