

HOW TO MANUFACTURE PUBLIC DOUBT:

**Analysis of the public relations techniques used
by the Climate Denial Industry**



DESMOGBLOG.COM

MARCH, 2009

*Updated for the Heartland Institute's 2009 "International Climate Change Conference"



Introduction

There is a long and well-documented history of the development of very effective public relations techniques that are used to create doubt about the realities of scientific conclusions that threaten to impose government regulation on corporations. Most of these techniques were developed and honed by public relations professionals working on behalf of the tobacco companies to downplay the harmful health effects of cigarettes in the late 80's and early 90's. For the last ten years or so, these same PR techniques have been used very effectively by free-market think tanks and fossil-fuel funded organizations to sow public doubt about the realities of climate change in the hopes of delaying government action on the issue.

Project DeSmog's team is comprised of communication and public relations professionals, writers, researchers and media experts. We have become a powerful participant in the Global Warming debate, working diligently to ensure that the public conversation remains on solid scientific ground.

Our analysis is based on over 10 years of research starting with DeSmog writer Ross Gelbspan who wrote the book *The Heat is on: the climate crisis, the cover up, the prescription* in 1998 that first uncovered what we call the Climate Denial Industry. In late 2005, The DeSmog Project was formalized by a 25-year public relations professional, Jim Hoggan who was fed up with the PR spindoctoring he was seeing on the issue of climate change. You can go hear to read Jim's original manifesto on the rational behind the formation of the DeSmog Project: [Slamming the Skeptic Scam](#).

Our website, DeSmogBlog.com, has played a powerful role in enabling us to become a recognized leading force in exposing and discrediting Global Warming public relations misinformation campaigns.

THE CLIMATE DENIAL INDUSTRY

The climate denial industry is a web of right-wing free market think tanks, ideologically motivated foundations and energy companies that have done a very good job at creating a widely held public perception that there remains serious doubt about the realities of climate change science and the conclusion that human-activity is to blame.

Oil and coal companies have poured millions into this network of denial and this has allowed for the absolute proliferation in the number of think tanks and organizations that reinforce the message that, among many arguments, climate change is not happening and/or that human activity is not to blame and therefore individuals and governments need not do anything about it.



Excerpt from a 1998 American Petroleum Institute document called the “**Global Science Communications Plan**” outlining a campaign to sow doubt about the scientific realities of climate change.

Global Climate Science Communications

Action Plan

Project Goal

A majority of the American public, including industry leadership, recognizes that significant uncertainties exist in climate science, and therefore raises questions among those (e.g., Congress) who chart the future U.S. course on global climate change.

Progress will be measured toward the goal. A measurement of the public's perspective on climate science will be taken before the plan is launched, and the same measurement will be taken at one or more as-yet-to-be-determined intervals as the plan is implemented.

Victory Will Be Achieved When

- Average citizens “understand” (recognize) uncertainties in climate science; recognition of uncertainties becomes part of the “conventional wisdom”
- Media “understands” (recognizes) uncertainties in climate science.
- Media coverage reflects balance on climate science and recognition of the validity of viewpoints that challenge the current “conventional wisdom”
- Industry senior leadership understands uncertainties in climate science, making them stronger ambassadors to those who shape climate policy
- Those promoting the Kyoto treaty on the basis of extant science appear to be out of touch with reality.

HOW TO MANUFACTURE PUBLIC DOUBT

What follows is an examination of the most common public relations techniques used by the climate denial industry to create doubt and delay action.

Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the "body of fact" that exists in the mind of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy. Within the business we recognize that a controversy exists. However, with the general public the consensus is that cigarettes are in some way harmful to the health.

- 1969 internal Brown and Williamson strategy paper

Technique: Expert doubt

There is a long history of using a technique first developed by the tobacco industry to prop up supposed “experts” that will provide contrary views on the scientific realities of climate change. You can trace the history of the tobacco lobbyists right into the energy lobbyists who use this technique to create doubt in the public mind about the certainty of scientific conclusions.

Organizations like the Chicago-based Heartland Institute were involved in the tobacco campaigns to create expert doubt long before they were in the business of climate change.

The Expert Doubt technique has been a mainstay for the climate denial industry. In fact a 1998 memo drafted for American Petroleum Institute (API) was uncovered that outlines a campaign to recruit and amplify in the media the opinions of expert doubters.

Named in the memo are some of the high-profile members of the climate denial industry, including:

- Steven J Milloy, the self-titled “Junkman”
- Myron Ebbell, Competitive Enterprise Institute
- Candace Candrall, Science and Environment Policy Project

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Excerpts from the 1993 paper titled "Revised Plan for the Public Launching of TASSC"

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goals of the media plan are to: (i) raise the awareness level of the use of unsound science in public policy decision making among target audiences; (ii) educate publics on the impact of this issue; and (iii) lay the groundwork and provide an environment for a successful grassroots mobilization effort to assist Philip Morris with its issues nationally and in target states.

MEDIA TRAINING

APCO will identify appropriate TASSC scientists/spokespeople to participate in the launch. Media training will be provided to each spokesperson by appropriate members of APCO's staff. Media training will include media guidance and tutelage via phone calls and face-to-face meetings.

MEDIA TOUR

APCO will arrange on-the-ground visits with at least three to four reporters in each city. These interviews, using TASSC's trained spokespeople, third-party allies (e.g., authors of books on unsound science), members of the TASSC Science Board, and/or Governor Carruthers will be scheduled for a one to two day media tour in each city.

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Excerpts from the 1998 American Petroleum Institute document called the "Global Science Communications Plan"

- Identify, recruit and train a team of five independent scientists to participate in media outreach. These will be individuals who do not have a long history of visibility and/or participation in the climate change debate. Rather, this team will consist of new faces who will add their voices to those recognized scientists who already are vocal.
- Develop a global climate science information kit for media including peer-reviewed papers that undercut the "conventional wisdom" on climate science. This kit also will include understandable communications, including simple fact sheets that present scientific uncertainties in language that the media and public can understand.

- Consider advertising the scientific uncertainties in *select* markets to support national, regional and local (e.g., workshops / debates), as appropriate

National Media Program Budget — \$600,000 plus paid advertising

Measurements

Various metrics will be used to track progress. These measurements will have to be determined in fleshing out the action plan and may include:

- Number of school teachers/students reached with our information on climate science.
- Number of science writers briefed and who report upon climate science uncertainties.

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Technique: Astroturfing

There's a tobacco PR strategy paper that outlines this technique very well. The tobacco industry figured out quite early on that the public would not see credible an argument that is pro-tobacco coming from a tobacco executives mouth, so they created fake grassroots organizations that could defend their interests and maintain a certain appearance of being third-party, neutral organizations. So the tobacco lobby created a very well financed organization called The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC). The goal of TASSC was to:

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While astroturf groups are the most desirable organization for industry campaigns, "independent" think tanks also can serve the same purpose, as they are also in a position of being once-removed from the corporation.

Diversifying the target issues of an astro-turf can add even further to the appearance that the group is not simply an industry front. TASSC strategized that their organization would not gain credibility in the eyes of the public and news media if the only issue they focused on was tobacco, so they derived a list of other topics that threatened to impose government regulations that they could also fight against.

At the top of their list was global warming.

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Excerpt of a TASSC memo discussing the diversification of issues

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As a starting point, we can identify key issues requiring sound scientific research and scientists that may have an interest in them. Some issues our European colleagues suggest include:

- ▶ Global warming
- ▶ Nuclear waste disposal
- ▶ Diseases and pests in agricultural products for transborder trade
- ▶ Biotechnology
- ▶ Eco-labeling for EC products
- ▶ Food processing and packaging

In each of these issues, there has been considerable discussion as to whether sound science is being used as a basis for these decisions. The diversity of these issues, and their tremendous impact upon business and industry, provides an excellent "tie-in" to the work TASSC is currently undertaking in the United States.

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In addition, our European colleagues suggest that there is heightened

#1: Steve Milloy called me today as a result of a conversation we had after the meeting on a question about how to improve science reporting in the U.S. and his comment to me that we're getting screwed by EPA and the media on the ETS issue. I had told him that if he or Mike Fumento had any brainstorms on the subject, we might be interested in discussing it with him. Apparently, his brain storms come faster than most. He'd like to look at the possibility of developing a Environmental Primer for reporters on what kind of questions reporters should ask when covering these stories. The guide might include a section on epidemiology and one on risk assessments. Among the examples used could be the ETS assessment.

He offered that this could be done without any association with us, and suggested that one way to publish and distribute it might be through Don Ritter's National Environmental Policy Institute. He estimates it might take up to 4 months to turnkey it to finished books. While he hadn't thought thru costs, he top-of-the-head estimated it might run about \$100,000.

I don't know what the Survival Guide ran, but \$100M struck me as relatively inexpensive for writing and printing a "primer" that could be sent to science writers, editors & news producers across the country. Since the ETS lawsuits are high on our list of litigation concerns, the contribution to his group to produce the primer might could come out of the litigation project budget.

Excerpts from the 1998 American Petroleum Institute document called the “**Global Science Communications Plan**” mentioning astroturfers, Steve Milloy, Myron Ebell and Candace Crandall, wife of well-known climate denier Dr. S. Fred Singer

GCSCI members who contributed to the development of the plan are A. John Adams, John Adams Associates; Candace Crandall, Science and Environmental Policy Project; David Rothbard, Committee For A Constructive Tomorrow; Jeffrey Salmon, The Marshall Institute; Lee Garrigan, Environmental Issues Council; Lynn Bouchey and Myron Ebell, Frontiers of Freedom; Peter Cleary, Americans for Tax Reform; Randy Randol, Exxon Corp.; Robert Gehri, The Southern Company; Sharon Kneiss, Chevron Corp; Steve Milloy, The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition; and Joseph Walker, American Petroleum Institute.

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Technique: Tortured Messaging

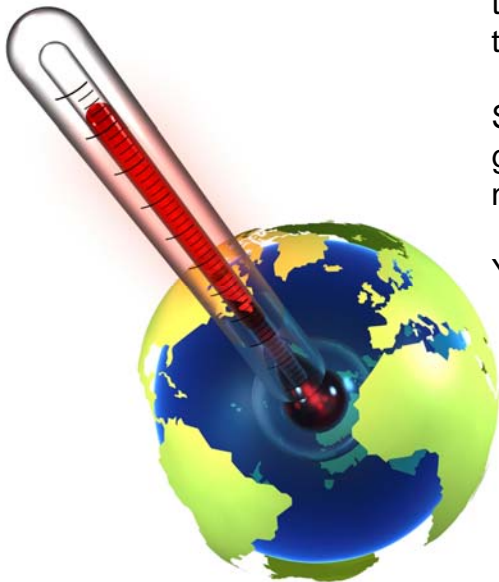
When there is no solid evidence left, sometime the only option available is to twist and turn reality in an attempt to back your desired messaging (i.e. that climate change is hoax). Many times, you'll see the same evidence scientists are using to reinforce their conclusions about the realities of climate change, turned on its head and used to argue the exact opposite.

Example:

“Since 1998, the earth’s temperature has been cooling” – the reason 1998 was an exceptionally hot year was due to a very warm and sustained El Nino. Every year since then has been cooler, but the overall trend still shows that there has been a continuing upward trend in global temperatures, they just haven’t been as warm as the spike in 1998 (except for 2005 which NASA reported as the hottest year on record). In fact, the last decade has been warmer than anytime in recorded history and while there is evidence that these warming trends may remain level for a while, scientists are insistent in their conclusion that this upward trend will continue aggressively after this leveling off phase.

So the same evidence scientists are using to reinforce the need to act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is being used by the climate denial industry as an excuse to do nothing.

You can read more on this here: [Hot or Not - making sense of climate variability](#)



Technique: Echo chamber

This technique plays on the old adage that if you repeat something often enough it becomes the truth. The idea is to take the **tortured messaging** and the **expert doubt** and then push it hard with media and online sources very quickly before there is a chance for others to correct the misinformation.

- **Convince one of the major news national TV journalists (e.g., John Stossel) to produce a report examining the scientific underpinnings of the Kyoto treaty.**
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- Excerpt from the 1998 American Petroleum Institute document called the "Global Science Communications Plan"



Technique: Message Shaping

Most public relations people know that you need to test and constantly re-test messaging, using such things as opinion polling and focus groups, to ensure that your message resonates with your target audience and also creates the desired perception. Over time you re-shape your message to stay in tune with the accepted social norms of the times.

This practice is rather innocuous when used to sell widgets, but it is a whole different ball game when it's used to sow doubt about an important issue like climate change.

The climate denial industry has done a good job of tailoring its messaging to fit the public sentiment at a given time in history. Over the last decade or so we've seen **three distinct phases in the climate denial industry's efforts to delay personal and government action:**

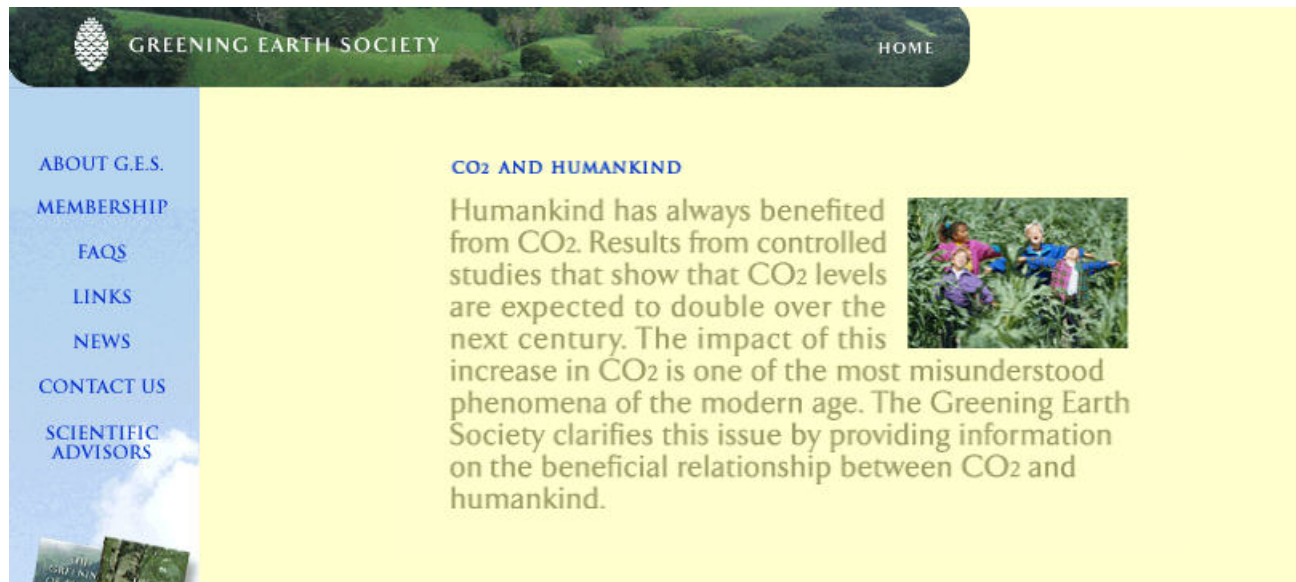
Phase 1: Global warming will be a benefit to the planet and humans

In the beginning phases of the Kyoto Protocol negotiations the Western Fuels Association led a very aggressive campaign arguing that global warming would be a benefit to agriculture and the world's food crops. This took the form of an organization called the "Greening Earth Society."

The Greening Earth Society was a non-profit set up by the Western Fuels Association, a co-op organization for the transport of coal to electrical generation plants.



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Screenshot of the now defunct “Greening Earth Society”

Phase 2: Global warming is a hoax

This is the phase that we are in right now, but slowly transitioning to the 3rd phase. The best way to describe the “global warming is a hoax” phase is that this argument was identified by public opinion researchers as the most effective way to delay action on the issue of climate change. It would create a sense of doubt in people’s minds about what scientists were concluding on the issue. It is easier to create doubt, than it is to change people’s minds entirely, so the climate denial industry used the techniques we described above (expert doubt, astroturfing and echo chamber) to create the necessary doubt. This campaign of doubt used the techniques mastered by the tobacco lobby when it was trying to convince the public and government that tobacco smoke was not as harmful as the scientists were saying it was.



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Excerpts from a 1995 strategy document prepared by opinion researcher Frank Luntz for the Republican Party

WINNING THE GLOBAL WARMING DEBATE – AN OVERVIEW

Please keep in mind the following communication recommendations as you address global warming in general, particularly as Democrats and opinion leaders attack President Bush over Kyoto.

1. ***The scientific debate remains open.*** Voters believe that there is *no consensus* about global warming within the scientific community. Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, *you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate*, and defer to scientists and other experts in the field.

The most important principle in any discussion of global warming is your commitment to sound science. Americans unanimously believe all environmental rules and regulations should be based on sound science and common sense. Similarly, our confidence in the ability of science and technology to solve our nation's ills is second to none. Both perceptions will work in your favor if properly cultivated.

The scientific debate is closing [against us] but not yet closed. There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science. Americans believe that all the strange weather that was associated with El Nino had something to do with global warming, and there is little you can do to convince them otherwise. However, only a handful of people believes the science of global warming is a closed question. Most Americans want more information so that they can make an informed decision. It is our job to provide that information.

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WORDS THAT WORK

"Scientists can extrapolate all kinds of things from today's data, but that doesn't tell us anything about tomorrow's world. You can't look back a million years and say that proves that we're heating the globe now hotter than it's ever been. After all, just 20 years ago scientists were worried about a new Ice Age."

Phase 3: The economic frame

With a US president taking the issue of climate change very seriously, an ever-growing body of evidence making it more and more clear the realities of climate change and the international community getting set to enact a new international treaty, it has become a lot more difficult to argue that climate change is a hoax – there's just too many forces aligned against this argument. The more savvy in the climate denial industry have now turned to the final play which is to argue that while climate change may be happening and may be caused by humans, it is just too expensive to do anything about it.

The economic frame is completely disingenuous when you see the same people who were telling us a year ago that climate change was a hoax now saying it's not, but we still shouldn't do anything about it.



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Excerpts from a 1995 strategy document prepared by opinion researcher Frank Luntz for the Republican Party

5. *The economic argument should be secondary.* Many of you will want to focus on the higher prices and lost jobs that would result from complying with Kyoto, but you can do better. Yes, when put in specific terms (food and fuel prices, for example) on an individual-by-individual basis, this argument does resonate. Yes, the fact that Kyoto would hurt the economic well being of seniors and the poor is of particular concern. However, the economic argument is less effective than each of the arguments listed above.

- 6) *If you must use the economic argument, stress that you are seeking "a fair balance" between the environment and the economy.* Be prepared to specify and quantify the jobs lost because of needless, excessive or redundant regulations.

LANGUAGE THAT WORKS

"We must not rush to judgment before all the facts are in. We need to ask more questions. We deserve more answers. And until we learn more, we should not commit America to any international document that handcuffs us either now or into the future."

Additional resources

We hope you found this report useful and pass this on to others so they too will be aware of the techniques being used to mislead and confuse the public on one of the most important issues we've ever faced.

Here's some further reading on the climate denial industry that you might be interested in:

DeSmogBlog co-founder Jim Hoggan's popular Manifesto "Slamming the Skeptic Scam"

<http://www.desmogblog.com/slamming-the-climate-skeptic-scam>

PDF version of the Luntz Memo:

<http://www.desmogblog.com/sites/beta.desmogblog.com/files/Luntz%20Memo.pdf>

PDF version of the API's Global Climate Science Communications Plan:

<http://www.desmogblog.com/sites/beta.desmogblog.com/files/API%20Global%20Climate%20Science%20Communications%20Plan.pdf>

PDF version of the Plan for the Public Launching of TASSC:

<http://www.desmogblog.com/sites/beta.desmogblog.com/files/revised%20plan%20public%20launching%20of%20tassc.pdf>

Slate article on the emerging agreement on the economics of climate change mitigation:

<http://www.thebigmoney.com/articles/hey-wait-minute/2009/02/11/surprise-economists-agree>

Report: King Coal And Big Oil Unite To Buy The Future, Spending More Than Two Million Dollars A Day:

<http://wonkroom.thinkprogress.org/2008/08/19/coal-and-oil-unite/>

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2003 Guardian Newspaper article on the Luntz Memo:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2003/mar/04/usnews.climatechange>

“Energy Debate Heats Up” a San Francisco Chronicle article describing the “Green Earth Society”

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/08/14/BU70391.DTL>

2007 Union of Concerned Scientists Report: Smoke, Mirrors & Hot Air: How ExxonMobil Uses Big Tobacco's Tactics to "Manufacture Uncertainty" on Climate Change

http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/global_warming_contrarians/exxonmobil-report-smoke.html

Exxon Secrets: a database exposing ExxonMobil’s funding of the climate denial industry:

<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/global-warming-and-energy/exxon-secrets>

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Feel free to contact us anytime with any information you think might interest us or for media inquiries

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