

Global Warming - Why Should I Care?

I attended the recent ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers) meeting and technical conference in Denver, CO. One of the things I always like to do at these technical conferences is attend the session devoted to an update of the current issues impacting our industry. This time there was a session devoted explicitly to global climate change. I got to the huge ballroom early so I could get a good seat for the presentations and as the first speaker took the stand, frankly I was shocked to look around and count less than 50 people in attendance. Clearly our industry is not taking the issue of global climate change very seriously. Now, if you are my age, you remember the scientific warnings in the 60's about the coming ice age. So I'll admit I have been somewhat slow to warm to the idea of global climate change (formerly called global warming, pun intended). But, as time goes by better data and more research support the prediction of increasing global temperatures. This global temperature increase as the result of greenhouse warming has a potentially devastating impact on global climate. Therefore, we should all take the issue very seriously and at a minimum **monitor very closely the private and public policies of the US and countries around the world**. I forecast that as the science becomes clearer in **"the next few years"**, this issue will have a **major impact** on each of us personally and on each of our businesses and the **products we design and manufacture**.

The difficulty is defining **"the next few years"**. What is the timeframe we should be concerned about? There is one timeframe already defined by the Kyoto protocol. And that timeframe is now - we are already behind. Of course, the US has not signed up to adhere to the Kyoto agreement, so that doesn't really concern us. Or does it? These decisions are too often politically motivated more than scientifically motivated. We all know that our commitment to the Kyoto agreement could change with the next presidential election. That is in November 2008 - a little over three years away. President Bush has been very consistent in his position and policy relative to climate change. But, even though many people seem unaware, we do have an official US policy regarding climate change. Basically it calls for an 18% reduction in the rate of increase of greenhouse gas emissions. See the links at the end of the article for more information on US policy. The policy also calls for a reevaluation of our progress relative to our reduction goal in 2012. Given the interest I see in our industry and other industries, I think it highly likely that we will come nowhere near that 18% reduction in the rate of growth, let alone actually reduce emission levels like most of the rest of the world is calling for. That being the case, it is not unreasonable to expect a new and much tougher policy on emissions on or before 2012, only seven years from now. So I think that reasonably defines "the next few years". If you aren't going to retire before 2012, then you can **expect a great deal of pressure on you, your products and your business to reduce emissions in the next three to seven years**. Given the life cycle of most products, three to seven years goes by in a hurry.

At the very least **be an informed business leader** and informed citizen. Make up your own mind about the validity of the data and the likelihood, timeframe and severity of impact on your business. Hopefully the next time you have the opportunity to hear some of the world's foremost experts speak on global climate change, like I had in Denver, the room won't be empty.

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The official US policy on global climate change:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/climatechange.html>

The Gleneagles Communiqué - the official communiqué from the July 2005 G8

meeting: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/climatechange.html>

Gateway to global change data and information:

<http://globalchange.gov/>

US Department of State fact sheet on global change:

<http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/fs/46741.htm>

National Climatic Data Center:

<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/ncdc.html>

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