

Eco Logic

-the green hornet

I was looking through a newspaper on the Metrorail last week that I found on the floor; I was desperate, and I came across an article about the environment. Basically, scientists from the government (presumably ours) snow and data center in Boulder Colorado allege that the arctic ice caps could be gone by 2012. I don't want to cause alarm, but that's just four years away!

I googled the subject for corroboration and found that accelerated melting of the arctic ice caps is not necessarily new news. So this recent Boulder commentary is an update to the conventional wisdom held back in 2005 that the arctic ice caps were projected to melt by 2050 by some accounts and as early as 2030 by others. But, just because the ice is melting doesn't mean we have to break out our swimming suits since rumor has it that this floating ice already displaces sufficient water in the oceans so it would not contribute to the sea levels rising as it melts; the global flooding would come from other sources.

Further supporting information indicates that "Greenland's ice sheet melted nearly 19 billion tons more than the previous high mark, and the volume of Arctic sea ice at summer's end was half what it was just four years earlier", according to new NASA satellite data obtained by The Associated Press.

So, other than the devastating consequences to the indigenous inhabitants of the affected areas, what does this melting mean to us? I'm not really sure, I manage the flow of pens and pencils for a living, but it does seem that it is further evidence of this thing called 'Global Warming'. In fact just last week at the climate talks in Bali, the US delegation caved to world pressures to adopt the provisions of an agreement reached by the rest of civilization. It's not so much that the US facilitated perceived progress, but rather the US agreed not to be an obstacle to it as is evidenced from the following excerpt from the Reuters News Service:

In a day of drama and emotional speeches, nations had berated and booed the U.S. representatives for holding out. A wave of relief swept the room when the United States relented.

"The United States is very committed to this effort and just wants to really ensure we all act together," said Paula Dobriansky, head of the U.S. delegation. "With that, Mr. Chairman, let me say to you we will go forward and join consensus," she said to cheers and claps.

"The U.S. has been humbled by the overwhelming message by developing countries that they are ready to be engaged with the problem, and it's been humiliated by the world community. I've never seen such a flip-flop in an environmental treaty context ever," said Bill Hare of Greenpeace.

Well I don't know if I would go so far as to characterize the event as Mr. Hare did but it does seem that; good, bad or indifferent, we're all hitched to the same wagon now. So roll up your sleeves and start installing those solar panels and windmills; not really, but maybe; actually it could make good economic sense.

Not that I'm 100% conversant with the Bali Accord, but I do know that it is an extension of the Kyoto Protocol, not that I'm 100% conversant with the Kyoto Protocol; remember I do pens & pencils. But a little about the Kyoto Protocol: it basically recognized two groups of nations: Industrialized countries that pollute in a big way and Non-industrialized countries that, through no fault of their own, don't pollute in a big way but who hope to some day. The Protocol assesses levels of responsibility to the polluters, referred to as Annex I countries and lessens the responsibility of the future polluters, referred to as non-Annex I countries.

The practice of buying and selling carbon credits is also involved, where the polluters can buy the permission to pollute from the non-polluting countries with the prospect of the non-polluters putting those funds towards greening their industries as they develop in the hopes that they won't pollute so much. We should note that, among assorted experts, scientists and critics, there is some debate about the actual value of the protocol. The US and Kazakhstan are the only participating nations (out of 170) not to have ratified the Kyoto act as of December 2007.

But now come the talks in Indonesia (Bali) where the US has, in essence, agreed to the provision where rich countries must do more in the efforts to reduce the emissions of green house gasses (GHG). Beyond that, the Bali Agreement sets time tables for further talks amongst the now cooperative nations, without targeting any specific goals.

So the earth is getting warmer and the ice is melting and I guess the extreme conclusion is that we end up like Venus where the atmosphere is 96% CO₂ exerting forces of 90 earth atmospheres (1,260 psi) at the surface with temperatures reaching 621° f and clouds of sulfuric acid covering the planet which is absolutely inhospitable to human life forms and sales reps alike. That may happen, but most assuredly it will be preceded by lesser, but wildly calamitous, disasters which include global flooding (caused by thermal expansion of water in the seas and the melting of glaciers and other Greenland artifacts) and extreme weather conditions; storms, droughts, unruly swings in the stock market, hives and irritability. In fact, there is no shortage of graphics and readily available statistics in print and on the internet to paint as bleak a picture as you would want to see.

The extent of the fallout that man's doping of the atmosphere will have, I guess we can never know with absolute certainty, because research and theory has shown that the earth does go through periodic cooling and heating phases without our contributions to the process. But what can be assured is that with the amount of stuff we're spewing into our thin layer of air, we can't be doing it any good. We are undoubtedly compounding certain natural processes and amplifying the results, possibly overloading the environment's ability to absorb the impacts, which may be upsetting the delicate balance in the atmosphere that is relied upon to perpetuate life as we know it- sheesh!

The earth's atmosphere is a defined blend of 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen and 1% other (I know, 'other' bothers me too). Any tampering with this mix could have disastrous results. At just 25%, oxygen becomes highly combustible which, makes it more and more volatile as the concentration increases. That's why in the olden days, doctors would have the patients' oxygen tanks turned off when they did their rounds in the hospital so they didn't blow the place up when they lit up a cigarette. Things sure have changed; doctors have to go outside with the rest of us to light up these days.

At any rate, we as a nation have been alluding to, and have now announced formally to the world, that we are taking this baking of the planet issue seriously and, as semi-chief pencil pusher, I feel it is my bounden duty to present and help interpret the mounds of contradictory and undoubtedly mis- information that perpetuates a sense of bafflement. Hopefully the direction should become clearer, most likely affecting us individually, as nations and local governments adopt standardized indexes that can measure and reconcile the net effects of energy consumption and alleged recycling processes. But more about that in future newsletters...where we can examine what the heck global warming is anyway. So please stay tuned for updates as we collectively race towards annihilation and oblivion. In the meantime, we should continue to recycle and cut down on our paper use.