

# Global Lukewarming

*School texts thunder about human-induced climate change, but the data are not convincing.*

## By Terence Corcoran

From textbooks to teacher instruction to government programs, our students are learning that human-induced climate change is upon us, it's a threat to the ecosystem, and action must be taken now.

A typical textbook is *Science 10*, published by Nelson Thomson Learning of Toronto and authorized for use in Ontario and other provinces. The opening section sets the tone. Titled "The Silence of the Frogs," it outlines the number of ways humans are killing off Canada's frog population. By page 13, we learn that global warming caused by the use of coal, oil and gas is "one hypotheses" that has been "linked" to the disappearance of frogs. By the end of *Science 10*, packed with ecosystem and biosphere menace posed by humans, four full chapters have been devoted to weather and climate change issues.

*Science 10* has an aura of scientific objectivity. It acknowledges uncertainty. But uncertainty is only a temporary way-station before it slips into the precautionary principle that turns uncertainty into a reason for action. "One of the problems in trying to determine whether global warming is natural, human-caused, or both is obtaining reliable experimental observations. Detailed data have been gathered for only a fairly short time, whereas changes occur over decades, centuries, and longer." So far, so good.

But then comes the uncertainty waiver. "Even so, waiting to see what happens in 25 years is probably not a good idea. Imagine how foolish it would be if you stopped cleaning your teeth regularly just because your teeth feel fine." Nothing like an appropriate analogy to drive home a dubious argument. People brush their teeth because it is a proven fact that brushing is effective on decay and gum disease, not because it might or might not be effective on a problem that might not even exist.

The truth is that *Science 10* is not about science, it's about environmental politics. At regular intervals, it asks students to "Take a Stand" on subjects that have nothing to do with science. For example, a section called Distance, Speed and Acceleration — good, solid science principles worth exploring — quickly begins pressing students to decide whether off-road vehicles should be more closely regulated.

Antidotes to *Science 10's* politicized climate science can be found at a number of sites. One of the best climate change organizations is The Science and Environmental Policy Project ([www.sepp.org](http://www.sepp.org)). At [www.globalwarming.org](http://www.globalwarming.org), research and policy reports take a skeptical view of climate science and policy. A quirky but lively centre of skeptical material is Still Waiting for Greenhouse, at [www.vision.net.au/~daly](http://www.vision.net.au/~daly).

In an era of politicized science — and no science is as politicized as global warming — they are far better sources than what your children are being given in school.

*(Adapted with permission from "Kodachrome Science," in the March 12, 2002 National Post.*

## By Margaret Wentle

Last fall, Bjorn Lomborg, a Danish statistician, published a book called *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. In it, he examined the research that underpins global warming and other environmental worries. His conclusion: Human activity is definitely heating up the planet but it's not the catastrophic threat people think it is. The author views Kyoto as a waste of money: "Despite our intuition that we need to do something drastic about global warming, we are in danger of implementing a cure that is more costly than the original affliction."

Mr. Lomborg has become Public Enemy Number 1 among environmental groups. Even in the science world, which is supposed to operate on facts and logic, he has been reviled. *Scientific American* devoted a large part of an issue to rebutting him. *Science* trashed him. *Nature* likened him to a Holocaust denier. "A lot of people really hate me," he says resignedly.

Perhaps Mr. Lomborg is perceived as particularly dangerous because he has no axe to grind. He's not an oil baron or a Republican, or beholden to them. He's a boyish 27-year-old professor who used to write cheques to Greenpeace. He describes himself as "your typical suburban environmentalist."

His book began as an effort to debunk the environmental skeptics. By the time he'd finished, he was one himself. "I felt cheated because I had spent my life believing something that turned out to be at least partly untrue," he told the *Sunday Times*. "I can understand why people feel offended by me."

Unlike this attackers', Mr. Lomborg's tone is mild and moderate. So are his conclusions. The world will heat up by 2°C to 3°C by the end of the century, he believes. There will be disruptions. But predictions of widespread crop failures, water shortages, disease, flooding, landslides, and other disasters are "hysterical." But even a massive investment in curbing greenhouse gases will have only a minimal effect on temperature.

Mr. Lomborg uses the same data as the Kyoto scientists. Even they admit the Kyoto accord won't reduce global warming very much. They predict that if we do nothing, temperatures will rise by between 1.4°C and 5.8°C. Mr. Lomborg's numbers are in the middle. "Obviously, the figure that gets quoted is the most extreme," he says.

The heretic of Kyoto is not universally reviled. *The Economist* called his book, "one of the most valuable books on public policy" in the last decade, and many leading scientists defend it. So does Patrick Moore, the Canadian who helped found Greenpeace and then became an environmental moderate. "It's very clear that extreme environmentalists are deeply threatened by the breath of fresh air Lomborg brings to the debate," he says on his website.

Even so, I don't advise you to go around in public suggesting that global warming might not be so bad after all. Global warming is at the heart of our cultural belief system. And it's never prudent to attack the faith.

*(Adapted with permission from "Global Warming: A Heretic's View" in the May 23, 2002 Globe and Mail.)*