

Stanford survey finds more doubt global warming

David Perlman, San Francisco Chronicle, 6-11-10

SAN FRANCISCO -- Although the vast majority of Americans believe the Earth is gradually warming because of greenhouse gases and want the government to regulate them, a small but growing number of people doubt that global warming is real, according to a new poll.

The Stanford University survey, released on Wednesday, found that 74 percent of those polled believe the world's temperature has been gradually rising over the past century, compared with 85 percent who believed it in 2006.

Of those who believe the problem is real, 86 percent think the government should limit air pollution and 76 percent favor strict government curbs on greenhouse gas emissions by industry.

The poll was conducted by telephone from June 1 to 7 with 1,000 randomly selected adults across the country and had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points, said survey organizer Jon Krosnick, a Stanford professor of political science and senior fellow at the university's Woods Institute for the Environment.

Krosnick is a nationally known expert on public opinion surveys and political polling. He has been conducting the poll on climate change annually for four years.

He wrote the survey's questions and commissioned GfK Roper, a professional opinion survey firm, to conduct the poll. He will be organizing two more polls on climate issues this year, he said, armed with a \$200,000 grant to Stanford from the National Science Foundation.

The survey conflicts with several recent opinion polls on global warming. A Gallup poll in March, for example, reported that 48 percent of Americans believe that "from what is said in the news, the seriousness of global warming (is) generally exaggerated."

Krosnick, however, noted that polls like the Gallup survey ask people specifically about their opinions based on media reports rather than on what people believe independently.

Despite the modest drop in the percentage of people who think global warming is real, it is clear that "the overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe the climate is warming and that government should do something about it," Krosnick said.

The decline in the number of people who think global warming is real, he said, is probably caused by the fact that 2008 was the coldest year since 2000. So Americans already doubtful about the reality of climate change would have had their skepticism strengthened by what was merely a scientifically insignificant one-year drop in a 100-year warming trend, he said.

Krosnick will hold a briefing in the nation's capital on his survey's findings today, the same day the Senate has scheduled seven hours of debate and a vote on a resolution by Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, to stop the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act.

The briefing in which Krosnick is presenting the poll results is being sponsored by the Environment and Energy Study Institute, an advocacy group.