

Waiting to battle warming 'imprudent,' NAS warns Congress

Lauren Morello, Environment & Energy Publishing, 5-12-11

Climate change is real and poses "significant risks" to society, the National Academy of Sciences said today, warning that delaying cuts in greenhouse gas emissions will make dealing with the problem harder in the future.

"Each additional ton of greenhouse gases emitted commits us to further change and greater risks," the report says.

The plain-spoken document, prepared in response to Congress' request for "action oriented" advice, says waiting to combat warming is "imprudent."

It calls for the federal government to take a lead role in combating climate change in the United States -- which it said cannot be addressed effectively with piecemeal efforts by state and local governments -- and abroad.

"The risks associated with doing business as usual are a much greater concern than the risks associated with engaging in strong response efforts," the report adds. "This is because many aspects of an 'overly ambitious' policy response could be reversed if needed, through subsequent policy change; whereas adverse changes in the climate system are much more difficult (indeed, on the timescale of our lifetimes, may be impossible) to 'undo.'"

The analysis, prepared by a team of scientists, economists and engineers, also weighs in on the state of climate science, which it deems sound -- though it says some degree of uncertainty about the rate and severity of future climate change is inevitable.

"Given the inherent complexities of the climate system, and the many social, economic, technological, and other factors that affect the climate system, we can expect always to be learning more and to be facing uncertainties regarding future risks," the report says. "This is not, however, a reason for inaction."