

Can you imagine watching the CBC National News and learning that six Canadians developed a life-threatening illness without the CBC offering any explanation as to the cause?

On July 17, 2002, the National had a story of two Albertan farmers selling their cattle and abandoning agriculture as a livelihood because drought had ruined their chance of harvesting sufficient feed for their livestock. The CBC offered no explanation.

There is drought in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Manitoba the rivers are swollen from unseasonably heavy rains. Southern Ontario is gripped by a record heat wave and smog advisory. Last summer smog advisories for southern Ontario doubled from the previous summer. Globally, the 1980s were the hottest decade in history until the 1990s shattered the record. Environment Canada has reported that the average temperature in Canada has risen by more than one degree over the past one hundred years.

Scientists can demonstrate the amount of carbon dioxide - the gas emitted when gasoline, natural gas, and coal are burned - in the atmosphere has soared in the past few decades to a level unprecedented in the past half million years.

Dare I mention global warming or more correctly global climatic change as a probable cause for the changes in prairie rainfall and Ontario's heat waves and smog? Whenever this issue is discussed by the media, it's presented as a hypothetical claim made by a few and discounted by many respected scientists.

In "The Heat is On: The High Stakes Battle over Earth's Threatened Climate" American journalist Ross Gelbspan puts to rest misconceptions over global climatic change. In November, 1995, 2,500 leading climatic scientists, members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, announced that planetary warming is occurring, that this warming is separate from the natural variability of the climate and that this warming is caused by emissions from burning coal and oil. Even if the warming is not obvious, they cautioned, it is already generating bizarre and extreme changes in the weather. They said that this new period of less stable climate is likely to cause widespread economic, social, and environmental dislocation. Potentially serious changes identified include regional occurrences of extremely high temperatures, floods, and droughts, with consequent fires and pest outbreaks.

For seven years, the majority of atmospheric scientists have concluded that global climatic change is real and it is caused by us. Global warming is not a fabrication of some crack-pot, tree-hugging, hippy-eco-scientist crying of wolf.

Gelbspan methodically evaluates the criticism of the very few vocal scientists who pooh-pooh global warming. They make frequent pronouncements on radio and television and write columns for major American papers to create a broad public belief that the question of climate change is hopelessly mired in unknowns. Gelbspan not only disproves their science, but he shows that they are supported by the deep pockets of coal and oil lobbies.

Of course, beyond the skeptics' denial lies our unwillingness to accept what we wish wasn't true. We feign to believe the sceptics to avoid whatever strong medicine we fear may be necessary to correct the problem.

Gelbspan's last chapter addresses resolving global climatic change. First, is to accept the findings of our scientific community. Second, is to plan the steps that will wean us of our dependency on fossil fuels. This isn't a bad idea even in the absence of global warning since fossil fuel reserves are growing scarce. Third is to shift to an energy conserving, energy efficient, renewable energy economy - a step that, according to Gelbspan, will cause less grief and create more wealth than the nay-sayers would have us believe.