

Betts: Thoughts On Copenhagen

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By *Alan Betts*

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(HOST) *Commentator Alan Betts has been thinking about the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.*

(BETTS) Diplomats from 192 nations are meeting in Copenhagen this week and next to try to draft a new Climate Change treaty - a successor to the Kyoto Protocol that achieved little, because the US refused to sign it. In a desperate effort to undermine global consensus, hackers broke into the computers at the Climate Research Unit in Britain a few weeks ago, and stole emails from the last ten years. The emails were then searched for comments from scientists that could be taken out of context and used to attack climate change research. What did they find?

When a scientist wrote something like:

"I have tried every trick I can think of on this tree ring data from Kyrgyzstan but I can't make sense of it" - the group of climate-change-denialists jumped on it, and claimed it shows that the scientists are somehow committing fraud. How ironic, when it is just this group of denialists, who have never collected any data anywhere, let alone in Kyrgyzstan, and don't want to understand the science of the real living earth - it is this group who have been fabricating fraudulent arguments for years.

When scientists discuss how to keep dishonest papers out of the reviewed scientific literature, which is our responsibility as scientists, they protest that we are silencing dissent. When scientists discuss how to deal with all the attacks on their research, and how to protect themselves from unlimited demands for their data files; the denialists claim that the scientists are hiding something. Just imagine for a moment that in your daily job, you have to deal with many requests a day for all your records, from groups whose only aim is to destroy your credibility.

But that reminds me of something that has concerned me for years. Many countries (but not the US) restrict access to their weather and climate data. This is wrong - there should be free and open access to all scientific data that is critical to understanding the earth system in all its beauty and complexity.

What can we learn from all this fuss? We have known for years that there are those who will say almost anything to avoid facing our responsibilities as a global community to protect the earth, its climate and ecosystems from damage caused by our industrial society. They have too much invested in the status quo, and a short-term outlook that doesn't consider what life will be like for our children.

When engineers advise us that the Lake Champlain Bridge, designed 80 years ago, is close to collapse - we don't like it, but we listen. Climate scientists are telling us that the earth's system is heading towards many crises this century, if we don't make the shift away from burning fossil fuels. We don't like it, but we should listen. The foundations of our industrial society are also old, and need rebuilding with clean, renewable energy supplies, if we are to thrive this century as a global community. We need a global agreement from Copenhagen.