



twelfth edition  
INDEX OF LEADING  
ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS  
2007

by Steven F. Hayward and Amy L. Kaleita

## DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

After years of public indifference, climate change has become the environmental issue that dwarfs all others. Attempts to address the issue are beset by two general problems. First, much of the research requires predicting conditions decades into the future, and constructing objective indicators of climate change in the present has become a contentious pursuit. How much is statistical “noise” or natural variability, and how much is intrinsic to the phenomenon of rising levels of greenhouse gases?

The 12th edition of the *Index of Leading Environmental Indicators* does not attempt to wade into the controversy, however, this year’s *Index* offers an expanded climate-change section. Author Dr. Steven Hayward of the Pacific Research Institute and the American Enterprise Institute attempts to develop a set of policy-relevant indicators (i.e. data that do not depend on a particular climate model or theory to be correct) and a set of secondary indicators of variables that are of increasing public concern.

The second problem is that the language of “skeptics versus alarmists” has put the issue of climate change into a straightjacket, leaving little room for a reasonable middle ground, or for people who believe our reach exceeds our grasp, in science and especially policy. So for the first time, the *Index* comes equipped with a DVD documentary—*An Inconvenient Truth...or Convenient Fiction?*—that presents an alternative to the climate extremism that is popular with Hollywood and other pessimistic enclaves.

### MR. GORE, HOLLYWOOD, AND THE MEDIA

The tremendous interest in climate change may have to do with the weather—2006 ranks among the warmest years on record, and the United States experienced a substantial heat wave in the summer. However, the shift in opinion is most likely neither serendipitous nor merely weather-related, but is owing also to a period of purposefully intense public campaigning from environmental advocates.

The media compiled with almost slavish devotion to the advocates' story line, with lavish cover stories in *Time*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Wired*, along with numerous global-warming specials on PBS, HBO, *60 Minutes*, and the network news broadcasts. Even the Weather Channel joined the parade. Perhaps the most notable new development was the launching of the Evangelical Climate Initiative, in which conservative evangelical Christians embraced the issue and called for urgent political action. The entire spectacle was capped by former Vice President Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* receiving the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

### SHOULD CLIMATE CHANGE ECLIPSE OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES?

A number of significant developments and milestones on the environment in 2006 deserved notice but were largely drowned out. This year's *Index* highlights some of them, particularly in air quality, water quality, toxics release inventory, biodiversity, soil erosion, and environmental media coverage.

As it has done over the past dozen years, the *Index* shines a spotlight on, and deepens our understanding of, environmental progress—the side of the environmental story that is seldom told. It does not shy away from bad news or tell only the good news; however, the media and activist obsession with bad news skews our priorities and blinds us to ways of transferring our successes to areas where there has been less progress.

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