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Bush's Plan on Warming Needs Work and Money, Experts Say

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 — The Bush administration's proposed four-year plan to study global warming is unlikely to clear up uncertainties — and thus unlikely to lead to shifts in policy — without significant changes and new money, a variety of climate experts said today.

Their comments came at the end of a three-day meeting organized by the administration and attended by more than 1,200 scientists, economists, officials and lobbyists from the energy industry and environmental groups. A final version of the administration's plan will be released in the spring, the administration said.

The meeting was intended to provide a public forum for dissecting the 170-page draft plan, issued in November, outlining a host of new climate questions that the administration wants answered.

President Bush has said that research must clear up questions about the risks posed by warming before he would support anything beyond voluntary measures to curtail emissions of heat-trapping gases, mainly carbon dioxide from fossil fuels.

Dr. James R. Mahoney, the assistant secretary of commerce in charge of the science of climate change, called it "a capstone issue for our generation and probably the next generation."

But tight budgets, Dr. Mahoney added, mean that most of the new effort will have to be aimed at choosing priorities and improving coordination of existing work, which is spread among more than a dozen agencies.

"There will be more resources," he said, "but I can assert there won't be massive new resources."

The country has been spending about \$1.7 billion a year for more than a decade on global change. But an array of experts on climate and environmental policy said much more money than that would be required to carry out the President Bush's proposal to improve monitoring of oceans and the air, refine computer climate models and conduct new studies of the effects of warming on ecosystems, water supplies and other resources.

New supercomputing projects in Japan, with power 10 times as great as that of American systems, have already shown potential to improve projections of climate changes, experts said at the meeting. But computing power thousands of times as great is needed to provide the level of detail that matters to specific regions like California or Congo, they said.

At least as important as money, many participants said, is generating the kind of research that policy makers need to make informed decisions on how aggressively to act.

The key is finding new ways to "connect science to decision making," said Dr. John M. Reilly, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who is studying climate policy. "There's really nothing in the plan about how that's going to be done."

Administration officials said the meeting was convened to give people the chance to air such criticisms. Changes will undoubtedly be made before a final plan is issued in April, the officials said.

Others experts at the meeting said they doubted that uncertainties about the risks of further warming could be allayed any time soon.

This could pose a political problem for President Bush, said a lobbyist representing energy companies that oppose restrictions on emissions. Oil and coal are the main source of carbon dioxide, the dominant heat-trapping gas.

The administration has created the impression that in two to four years it will be able to deliver meaningful results, said the lobbyist, who spoke on condition of anonymity. He added, "That's a problem."

Last year the president called for more research, saying that short-term economic harm from promptly cutting gas emissions outweighed taking major action on the still-murky risks to ecosystems, water supplies and other resources.

Mr. Bush has also called for long-term programs to develop new ways to produce vast amounts of energy without adding emissions.

At the meeting, many scientists said their chief concern with the plan was the absence of a goal.

"Policy makers have never told us how much we have to reduce the uncertainty," said Dr. Edward S. Sarachik, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Washington. "At what point are we finished with the job?"