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## Experts Fault Bush's Proposal to Examine Climate Change

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

**A** panel of experts has strongly criticized the Bush administration's proposed research plan on the risks of global warming, saying that it "lacks most of the elements of a strategic plan" and that its goals cannot be achieved without far more money than the White House has sought for climate research.

The 17 experts, in a report issued yesterday, said that without substantial changes, the administration's plan would be unlikely to accomplish the aim laid out by President Bush in several speeches: to help decision makers and the public determine how serious the problem is so that they can make clear choices about how to deal with it.

The president has said that more research is needed before the administration can even consider mandatory restrictions on heat-trapping greenhouse gases linked to global warming.

The expert panel, convened by the National Academy of Sciences at the administration's request, said some of the plan's proposals for new research seemed to rehash questions that had already been largely settled.

It also found that the plan listed dozens of disparate research goals without setting priorities — a particularly important failing, it said, inasmuch as the plan is intended to integrate about \$1.7 billion a year in climate research now being conducted by more than a dozen agencies.

The plan, the experts concluded, lacks "a guiding vision, executable goals, clear timetables and criteria for measuring progress, an assessment of whether existing programs are capable of meeting these goals, explicit prioritization and a management plan."

Senior administration officials said they welcomed the panel's critique of the draft plan, and added that the final plan, scheduled for release in April, would most likely reflect some of the suggestions.

"It may sound like 'Oh, yes, please hit me again,'" said Dr. James R. Mahoney, an assistant secretary of commerce who is director of the federal Climate Change Science Program. But, he added, "I absolutely welcome their comments, even though it may sound like they're fairly harsh."

The administration's plan calls for a vast array of work through the rest of the decade on goals like improving computer simulations of climate shifts, integrating measurements of global change and clarifying regional effects of warming.

The panel brought together to critique the plan was drawn from the academic world, businesses including Honeywell and BP, and a private environmental organization. (The names of its members, along with the text of the report, are online at [www.nas.edu](http://www.nas.edu).)

The experts credited the administration for undertaking the effort in the first place. A broad government plan for climate research is required under a 1990 law, the Global Change Research Act, but was never completed during the administration of Mr. Bush's father or in the Clinton administration. As a result, many experts say, climate research has suffered.

For example, American efforts to refine advanced computer models used to project the effects of rising greenhouse-gas concentrations have fallen behind those overseas, partly because of a lack of coordination.

A unified approach is necessary, the new report concluded. But while the administration's plan is "an important first step," the experts said, it needs many changes, and more money.

"They get an A for effort," said one panel member, Dr. Diane M. McKnight, a professor of engineering at the University of Colorado. Another author, Dr. Michael J. Prather, an earth sciences expert at the University of California at Irvine, joined in academic metaphor: "This is the student paper that gets sent back two-thirds of the way through the term with red marks all over it. It doesn't have a grade yet."

A particular concern among some on the panel was the plan's proposed focus on scientific questions that many experts say have been resolved.

"In some areas, it's as if these people were not cognizant of the existing science," said one member, Dr. William H. Schlesinger, dean of the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences at Duke University. "Stuff that would have been cutting edge in 1980 is listed as a priority for the future."

For example, the report said, far more is already known about human activity's contribution to global warming than is suggested by the administration's plan, which, the panel said, expresses too much uncertainty about the question.

As for the report's assessment that the plan is more ambitious than the current government financing of \$1.7 billion for climate research can support, Dr. Mahoney, of the Commerce Department, acknowledged that the budget was not likely to grow significantly this year or next, but noted that most other government programs were experiencing significant cuts.

In concluding that a flat budget would not be enough, the report said the goals could be accomplished only with "greatly increased" spending or sharp cutbacks in other government research money to allow the savings to flow to climate studies.

The panel was convened by the National Research Council, the research arm of the National Academy of Sciences, which advises the government on scientific and technical matters.

Its report, said lawmakers who have long criticized the administration's climate policies, supports their contention that the goal of more research is really an excuse for more delay. "Global climate change affects every aspect of our daily lives, from land and water resources to agriculture and human health," said Senator John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who is seeking his party's nomination to run against Mr. Bush next year. He said the findings "should be a wake-up call for this administration."

Senator James M. Inhofe, the Oklahoma Republican who is chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, defended the plan, saying it followed "a prudent course by trying to strengthen our limited understanding of the underlying causes and impacts of climate change."

Since the draft research plan was issued in November, more than 270 written comments have been received, from sources as varied as environmental groups and companies whose business could be harmed by limits on emissions.

Dr. Mahoney said the initial plan had always been considered a rough draft. "It's like getting a ship into motion," he said. "Let's make a solid start, and then we've got something to critique and build on."

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