

Frank Press

President of National Academy of Sciences



NAS chief asks nations to help save environment

By Carole Stone, Cornell Chronicle

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Unlike the well-researched problems of ozone destruction and acid rain, global warming is a threat to the environment in theory only, yet it is such a serious threat that we should take every step we can afford to minimize it, the director of the National Academy of Sciences told a Cornell audience last week.

The question of the hour is: "How much should we spend to improve the situation in light of the uncertainty of our prediction?" said Frank Press, a renowned geophysicist and former science adviser to President Carter.

The nations of the world should work together to take sensible, affordable steps that will lessen the impact of global climatic change, he said.

However, measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane and chlorofluorocarbons – by as much as half could cost trillions of dollars and should not be undertaken.

During a three-day visit to campus, Press, the Bartels World Affairs Fellow for the spring term, met with several under graduate classes in government and in science technology and society.

In his public lecture on global environmental change, he repeated climatologists' dire warnings about the future – the strong possibility of a rise in surface temperatures and a rise in sea levels, droughts in equatorial areas, river floodings, change in biological habitats, migrations of animal and human populations and the risks of disease.

He outlined several preventions; chief among them was conservation.

Other familiar tactics included replacing chlorofluorocarbons with a less harmful substance and banning CFC's altogether, reforestation, and research and development of alternative energy sources.

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He also urged water conservation, bioengineering of drought-resistant crops, coastline preparation for a rise in sea levels and programs for disease surveillance.

The best estimate for the cost of these measures, which could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent, is \$200 billion per year to be spread out among all the nations on Earth.

That's affordable, he said, and should be done.