

# WE ARE THINKING THE WRONG THOUGHTS

*by Dennis Ambler*



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Those of who have long been in denial about the realities of global warming and the credibility of the IPCC, can now feel relieved, there may be hope for us yet. The diagnosis has been made; we have a psychological problem, which so far has failed to respond to the millions upon millions of dollars spent in “communicating” climate change to the masses.

However, the process of our redemption is already underway: A new publication called “**Communicating climate change to mass public audiences**” has just been presented to the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change, by the “Climate Change Communication Advisory Group”.

(Yes, the UK does have a Minister for Climate Change, however, in 1976, there was actually a [Minister for Drought](#), who was one of the most effective politicians in history, because within three days of his appointment, it had started raining.)

**What is the Climate Change Communication Advisory Group** – This UK group is a project of the [Public Interest Research Centre](#), an “independent” group who are partially financed by the UK government’s Economic and Social Research Council. CCCAG is university based, with five psychology departments involved, including the US and also has WWF-UK as a member.

[Communicating climate change to mass public audiences](#) Working Document, September 2010

“This short advisory paper collates a set of recommendations about how best to shape **mass public communications aimed at increasing concern about climate change** and motivating commensurate behavioural changes.

“Its focus is not upon motivating small private-sphere behavioural changes on a piece-meal basis. Rather, it marshals evidence about how best to motivate the **ambitious and systemic behavioural change** that is necessary – including, crucially, greater public engagement with the policy process (through, for example, **lobbying decision-makers and elected representatives, or participating in demonstrations**), as well as major lifestyle changes.”

The first claims to exploring the psychology of “climate change denial” came from the University of the West of England last year.

**Conference - Facing Climate Change, Climate Change Denial**  
[University of the West of England](#), 7 March 2009

“Man-made climate change poses an unprecedented threat to the global ecosystem and yet the response, from national policy makers right through to individual consumers, remains tragically inadequate. The Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England is organising a major interdisciplinary event Facing Climate Change on this topic at UWE on 7 March 2009.

Facing Climate Change is the first national conference to specifically explore 'climate change denial'.

This conference aims to strengthen our awareness of the challenge facing us and to enhance our capacity for effective decision-making and action. It will do this by bringing together a group of people - climate change activists, eco-psychologists, psychotherapists and social researchers - who are uniquely qualified to assess the human dimensions of this human-made problem.

Professor Paul Hoggett is helping to organise the conference, he said, “We will **examine denial** from a variety of different perspectives - as the product of **addiction to consumption**, as the outcome of **diffusion of responsibility** and the idea that someone else will sort it out and as the consequence of **living in a perverse culture which encourages collusion, complacency, irresponsibility.**”

The idea obviously has a lot of traction for those seeking to promote control of our daily lives by energy taxation and in November last year, along came the American Psychological Association with their own conference.

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**American Psychological Association**

**Highlights** of the 2009 [Behavior, Energy, and Climate Change Conference](#)

“More than 600 climate change researchers, policymakers, and utility industry officials gathered to share information and ideas about how to respond to energy and climate change challenges. The contributions of psychology and other behavioral and social sciences was a leading theme of the conference’s major sessions as well as in informal discussions among participants.

**US Congressman Brian Baird** (D-Washington), who is a clinical psychologist and former psychology professor, gave a plenary address emphasizing the need to change the public’s understanding of global climate change, suggesting that the phenomenon be renamed “global over-heating.”



In a separate panel session on translating ideas into policy, Katrina Lassiter from Rep. Baird's office described the effort in Congress to create a **new office on behavioral and social science research within the Department of Energy**.

**This proposal has been approved at the committee level** and is awaiting a vote by the entire House.

Kevin Hurst of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy spoke about the need to **involve the behavioral and social sciences in the design and promotion of the Smart Grid**, an emerging electricity transmission system that will be responsive to household energy use patterns."

"And David Hungerford of the California Energy Commission provided **tips to scientists on how they can communicate effectively to policy-makers** through succinct executive summaries, policy analyses, and trade journal articles.

Similarly, Rick Diamond of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory discussed **how to change the minds of government officials** who do not believe the social sciences have a role to play in solving the climate change problem."

Once started these things carry on ad infinitum: "The next **Behavior, Energy, and Climate Change Conference** will be held on November 14-17, 2010, in Sacramento, California." No doubt the dates are already in place for the next five years.

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Whilst I am not suggesting for one moment that we are yet on the verge of using psychiatry as the [Soviets](#) did and as the Chinese still do, (after all, that would be paranoid), it is a strange situation where challenges to scientific doctrine cannot be seen in any other way than as a mental condition.

The Chairman of the Inter-Academy panel that was set up to review the practices of the IPCC, said in a recent interview that there was a "communication problem" in getting the IPCC message across:

"There's just a small number of people who can really communicate to both sides -- speak to scientists, understand what they do, and speak to **the public**, which **speaks a different language** and so on.

I don't know what they're going to do about this in the end, but my sense is that they're going to have to rely, if they want to take this on, **they'll have to rely on some external people.**"

He needn't worry, I think there are enough people already on the case, at our expense, thinking of ways to get us to accept that we need to pay taxes on the trace gas carbon dioxide, for our own moral well-being and the survival of the planet and to do so willingly.

Now someone go and psycho-analyse that!



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