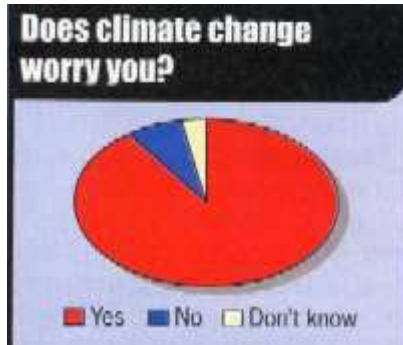


Poll shows that UK Civil Engineers are worried about Climate Change

More than 80% civil engineers are now not only convinced that Climate Change is taking place: They also claim to be worried about it, according to a poll of 519 Chartered UK Civil Engineers.



The poll was carried out by the New Civil Engineer, the official weekly magazine of the profession, which is sent out to all members of the Institution of Civil Engineers. It was published in the 19 January 2006 edition.

What is more striking is that 56% said that they were prepared to change their lifestyles to help cut Britain's energy consumption, and 51% of those that expressed an opinion say that they would be prepared to alter their lifestyles to reduce the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, but would only do so - probably quite pragmatically and reasonably - if pushed to so do by taxation or legislation to take these steps. Also, in the response to these questions a surprisingly large percentage actually said they would be prepared to change their lifestyle "a lot".

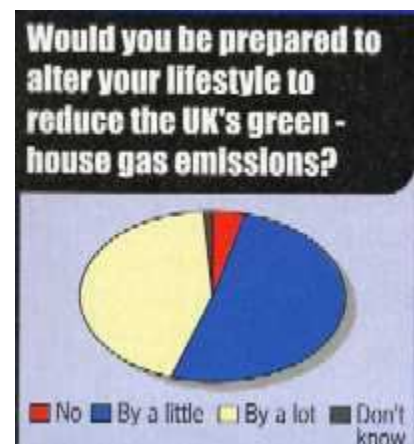
Subsequent editions have not raised any comment from the members in the letter page or the editorial. So we can assume that acceptance of anthropomorphic Climate Change in the profession is mainstream and uncontested.

The poll was actually carried out to gauge the opinions of the profession on the nuclear debate currently underway; a debate which has been given additional momentum by Dr Lovelock's view that global warming effects are so severe, and so inevitable now, that unless the rate of carbon emissions are reduced in less time than is available for normal political and economic action, there will be no means by which the inevitable drift toward catastrophe of Climate Change can be halted.

Furthermore, Lovelock (originator of the Gaia Theory of natural systems) says that the UK has no choice but to go-nuclear again in a big way, especially since most of the 21% of our power which is at present generated by nuclear power stations is soon to be lost when they are closed, due to ageing.

In fact, unless these stations are refurbished soon to extend their lives, only 7% of our power will be generated from nuclear by 2013, and we will have to build new nuclear plants just to avoid a significant demand for alternative forms of generation, which can only be fully satisfied from non-renewable (fossil fuel) sources, and thereby raising our national carbon dioxide emissions.

- Nuclear power is relatively carbon neutral, but all new nuclear installations have been halted for the past 15 years or so in the UK, due to:



- public hostility to the acceptance of the risk of nuclear incidents,
- the inability of the UK government to solve the problem of nuclear waste disposal,
- and concerns about nuclear proliferation should the UK be shown to be encouraging the use of nuclear at home when maintaining a policy that the developing nations should not themselves “Go nuclear”.

Therefore, Dr Lovelock has proposed that dangerous or not, the UK should build more nuclear power plants, and this has encouraged government and professionals alike to reopen the nuclear debate. This debate has now started, and early indications are that the civil engineers involved in much of the energy strategy work and opinion-forming within government will be so concerned about carbon dioxide emissions that all other concerns about nuclear power will be pushed aside. Such risks may be seen as “risks to be managed” and risk taking of this magnitude, as being a reasonable strategy, when faced by the alternative threat of global catastrophe.

However, whatever one’s view may be on the nuclear power debate, the groundswell of opinion is changing at least among this group of professionals. Although one poll can never be considered conclusive it shows that these professionals at least, comprise a constituency of opinion which, if in time this was repeated across the community, would begin to sway the government toward measures which might bring real change in the future.



Steve Last is an environmental engineer who is also a Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv), and lives in the county of Shropshire, UK. CEnv is a new and growing academic discipline created in the last two years. All Chartered Environmentalists pledge to further the principles of sustainability.

Please visit “Climate Change for Better or Worse”, an independent web site about Climate Change www.climate-change.me.uk .

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