



ETC Group
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So Long, Venus! Hello Mars! Orbit Engineering Proposal Takes Top Prize in ETC Group's Pie-in-the-Sky Contest for Do-it-Yourself Geo-engineers

Vicky Schutte of Oakville, Ontario (Canada) took top honors today in ETC Group's international geo-engineering contest for her proposal to combat climate change by re-engineering the earth's orbit. Her idea is to nudge the planet further from the sun (and closer to Mars). In her entry, Schutte helpfully pointed out that expanding the earth's orbit would not only increase the distance between the earth and sun, thereby cooling the planet, but it would also take our birthdays longer to come around – climate salvation and fountain of youth all in one! The contest calling for geo-engineering proposals closed on April Fools' Day, netting 46 entries from 13 countries.

Geo-engineering refers to large-scale, intentional manipulations of the earth's land, sea and atmosphere to combat the effects of climate change. Schemes that would have been dismissed as science-fiction a few years ago are now gaining legitimacy in the view of some governments and scientific institutions. ETC's Pie-in-the-Sky contest aimed to highlight the absurdity – and danger – of carrying out planetary-scale experiments with unknown consequences.

ETC Group's Diana Bronson, in Anchorage, Alaska, attending the Indigenous Peoples Summit on Climate Change, noted that picking the Pie-in-the-Sky winner was no cakewalk. "There were lots of great entries, and we all had our favorites. I quite liked the idea of granting carbon offsets to anyone having their teeth whitened and willing to smile up at the sun, reflecting UV light away from the earth's surface. But since the beginning of February when we launched the contest, geo-engineering has gained real mainstream steam – in a report by the UK's House of Commons,¹ at an international science congress² and in an interview with the Obama administration's Science Adviser.³ We decided to choose a proposal envisioning a massive re-engineering of the planet. In terms of scale and consequence, the winning proposal to modify the earth's orbit is not so different from real proposals to simulate volcanic eruptions or cover the earth's deserts in white plastic."⁴

1 UK House of Commons Select Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills, "Engineering: Turning ideas into reality," published March 2009; see chapter on geo-engineering at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdius/50/5007.htm>

2 International Scientific Congress on Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions, Copenhagen, Denmark 10-12 March 2009.

3 Seth Borenstein, "Obama looks at climate engineering," Associated Press, 8 April 2009, on the Internet at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hm1kMpA2nQALOfQL8Y8PxxTHNVtgD97EG5200>

4 ETC Group *Communiqué*, "Gambling with Gaia," January 2007, on the Internet:

Verónica Villa, in ETC's Mexico office, was especially taken with the proposal to toss leftover brussels sprouts and other iron-rich, but taste-poor green veggies off the Golden Gate Bridge to 'fertilize' the ocean and promote carbon sequestration. But since real-world geo-engineers have already tried fertilizing the ocean with iron,⁵ Villa, too, leaned toward Schutte's orbit-altering proposal. Villa points out, "Today is not only Earth Day; it's also the last day of meetings of a technical expert group of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity [CBD] discussing issues related to climate change and biodiversity."⁶ Geo-engineering is a great threat to biodiversity and it's critically important for governments at the CBD, as well as the scientific community, to start debunking the idea that a massive techno-fix can solve our climate problems. That's what the Pie-in-the-Sky contest was all about."

All contest entries are available in English and Spanish at the Pie-in-the-Sky web site:
<http://www.pieintheskycontest.org/>

Schutte's winning entry has been illustrated and turned into a mock promotional poster, available for download here: http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=743

N.B. As with many of the outrageous proposals submitted, it turns out that even the winning entry has been taken seriously, although when orbit-engineering was proposed back in 2001, it wasn't expected to be implemented for a few million years. (See, Dennis Newman, "Astronomers hatch plan to move Earth's orbit from warming sun," 5 February 2001, *CNN.com*)

For an introduction to geo-engineering, see ETC Group *Communiqué*, "Gambling with Gaia," January 2007, at: http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=608

For more information about geoengineering and ETC's Pie-in-the-Sky contest:

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http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=608

5 See, for example, ETC Group News Release, "LOHAFEX Update: Geo-engineering ship plows on as Environment Ministry calls for a halt," 13 January 2009, on the Internet:

http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=712

6 Convention on Biological Diversity, Second meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change, Helsinki, Finland, 18-22 April 2009.