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Superfreaky solution to global warming

October 25, 11:44 PM - DC Environmental Policy Examiner - JoAnn Blake



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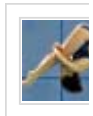
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The authors of the just-published book, "SuperFreakonomics," a sequel to the popular "Freakonomics," think they've found a cheap and simple fix to global warming – one that rivals the success of the polio vaccine.

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The solution involves shooting tons of sulfur dioxide through a 2-inch diameter, fire hose suspended in sections by hundreds of balloons, straight into the sky.

This geoengineering idea came from Nathan Myhrvold of Intellectual Ventures in Bellevue, Wash. The book's authors, journalist Stephen Dubner and economist Steven Levitt, seem to embrace the thinking fully because it means there's no need to worry about the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, or about changing polluting and wasteful behavior, or about trying to forge international treaties. Just chill out and move on to other problems.



The hose solution and other geoengineering ideas suggested by scientists over the past several years -- solar mirrors in space, sulfur sunscreens, cloud seeding and carbon dioxide scrubbers – could indeed cool the Earth and are proposed as a last resort if global warming spins out of control. But the difficulty lies in exchanging one environmental crisis for another.

Ken Caldeira, a Stanford University climate scientist who was misrepresented in the book on the danger of carbon dioxide, told BBC News that a better solution would be to change our lifestyles by reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. "I think the Earth's system is so complicated that our interfering with it is very likely to screw things up and very unlikely to improve

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things," he says.

So why are we waiting for more catastrophes to build up before we seriously tackle this problem?

One of the most insightful answers I've found came from Daniel Gilbert, professor of psychology at Harvard University (published in the op-ed section of the *Los Angeles Times*):

"Because we barely notice changes that happen gradually, we accept gradual changes that we would reject if they happened abruptly. Environmentalists despair that global warming is happening so fast. In fact, it isn't happening fast enough...The human brain is a remarkable device that was designed to rise to special occasions. We are the progeny of people who hunted and gathered, whose lives were brief and whose greatest threat was a man with a stick. When terrorists attack, we respond with crushing force and firm resolve, just as our ancestors would have.

"Global warming is a deadly threat precisely because it fails to trip the brain's alarm, leaving us soundly asleep in a burning bed."

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