

Book on Global Warming: Replace Wishful Thinking with Bottom-Up Initiatives

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A new book on the bogged-down international politics of global warming lays out a detailed roadmap on how to leverage the self-interest of countries to address climate change rather than relying on high-profile international climate conferences that accomplish little.

"Global Warming Gridlock: Creating More Effective Strategies for Protecting the Planet" is written by David Victor, a professor at the School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at the University of California, San Diego, where he also leads the Laboratory on International Law and Regulation.

Victor's book explains why current policies have not worked in the two decades since formal United Nations talks on climate change began. Yet the big UN talks continue, even though most participants don't give them much chance of success.

"An endless stream of new diplomatic events is on the calendar even though expectations for serious progress have never been lower," said Victor. "Meanwhile, as international talks have ground to a halt, emissions of greenhouse gases between 1990 and 2008 rose by 1 billion metric tons per year for the U.S. and by 3.6 billion metric tons per year for China."

Victor provides an incisive analysis on why current policies on global warming are not working-and offers a clear roadmap for better results. Arguing that the current focus on solely reducing emissions is misguided and unrealistic, Victor asserts that a better approach would be to create "bottom-up" policies at the national level that transform the way energy is used.

Rather than aiming for progress at an untenable pace-which often does not take into account what governments either can or are willing to do-he demonstrates that progress on climate change can be achieved through three key steps: creating "climate clubs" that target incremental change; making incentives for technological innovation; and adapting to the currently warming environment.

An expert on international cooperation, environmental regulation, and energy markets, Victor points to alternative examples of successful international cooperation in "Global Warming Gridlock." Using the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organization as key examples, he describes that such agreements were largely successful because they were at first made through "clubs" that focused on effecting small, practical change. Ultimately, the more demanding and complex the change in policy, the more vital it is that smaller groups are created in order to negotiate complicated and contingent deals.

Such an approach is not going to be easy, fast, or cheap. "The central argument of this book is that a better strategy for global warming begins by slowing down and refocusing on fundamentals," Victor said. "Better diplomacy requires models for international cooperation that are well suited to the problem at hand."

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