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The world demonstrates against climate change, but US public concern wanes

Activities around the world Saturday focused on the need to reduce carbon emissions. But a new Pew survey shows that fewer and fewer Americans believe there is solid evidence the earth is warming.

By **Brad Knickerbocker** | Staff writer/ October 24, 2009 edition

Around the world Saturday, environmental activists touted the number “350” as a way to recognize the seriousness of global climate change.

It’s not a secret code. The number refers to the concentration of carbon in the atmosphere – meeting a goal of 350 parts per million (ppm), which is considerably less than the current level of 387 ppm.

The “International Day of Climate Action” includes more than 4,500 events in 173 countries. Everything from skiers in New Zealand spelling out “350” on a snowy slope to a mass bike ride in Canada to tree planting in Ghana. Here’s an [interactive map](#) of the day’s activities.

“It seems far-fetched that you could get this many people to rally around a scientific data point, but the number just keeps climbing,” says Bill McKibben, author, activist, and founder of 350.Org. “It shows just how scared of global warming much of the planet really is, and how fed up at the inaction of our leaders.”

Environmentalists see today’s events as a call to action – in the US Congress and at the United Nations climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December.

“The Arctic is already melting, sea level is already rising, and polar bears are already dying,” says Rose Braz of the [Center for Biological Diversity](#). “As President Obama prepares for the international climate negotiations in Copenhagen, the time to act is now. If we fail to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide to 350 parts per million or below, many thousands of species, including our own human race, face a perilous future.”

Yhough Saturday’s turnout may have been impressive – Archbishop Desmond Tutu was among the luminaries involved as “messengers” – public interest in and concern about global climate change have been dropping in the United States. This, according to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, which released [new survey results](#) this week. The conclusion:

“There has been a sharp decline over the past year in the percentage of Americans who say there is solid evidence that global temperatures are rising. And fewer also see global warming as a very serious problem – 35 percent say that today, down from 44 percent in April 2008.”

Pew finds that since April 2008, the percentage of Americans surveyed who believe there is “solid evidence the earth is warming” has dropped from 71 percent to 57 percent.

“Over the same period,” reports Pew, “there has been a comparable decline in the proportion of Americans who say global temperatures are rising as a result of human activity, such as burning fossil fuels. Just 36 percent say that currently, down from 47 percent last year.”

Although the decline is steeper for Republicans, the drop-off occurred among Democrats and especially among Independents. All of which makes it tougher for lawmakers to pass substantive laws dealing with greenhouse-gas emissions, for the Obama administration as it assumes a stronger environmental leadership role for the United States, and for diplomats trying to negotiate international agreements reversing global warming.

So once all of today’s hoopla is a memory, the 350.org folks will still have a lot of work ahead of them.

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