

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

After dismissing the doubts of climate change skeptics as ravings, Ryan Brook (*InfoNorth*, June 2009) embarks on a rambling discourse on the carbon footprint left by field research in the Arctic, which, he alleges, is large and should be reduced. The few suggestions Dr. Brook offers for its mitigation are largely limited to recommendations buried in figure captions, ranging from the vague (use of solar and wind power in field camps) to the specious (the piston-engined Robinson 44 and turbine-powered Bell Jet Ranger helicopters are not comparable, as the latter far outperforms the former).

During my career as a federal government geologist, I was charged with the geological mapping of uninhabited Arctic areas thousands of square kilometres in extent, with the work to be completed in one or two summers. How does Dr. Brook propose that this work be done without the use of capable motorized aircraft and boats? Pack dogs and rowboats?

I don't know the nature of Dr. Brook's Arctic research, but I can suggest two ways in which he could decrease his carbon footprint: (1) Cut his conference travel in half by attending only two, instead of his usual four, meetings a year and (2) forgo the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December and ask a Danish colleague, preferably one within walking distance of the venue, to stand in for him.

Yours sincerely,
Thomas Frisch
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Dear Editor:

The overwhelming majority of the earth's scientists believe that climate change is a fact that has been well established in numerous studies; however, the willingness of scientists to make personal changes to reduce the carbon footprint associated with their research is far less evident. Whether it is a scientist doing important work in the North or a soccer mom who feels the need for a large SUV to get her kids and groceries home safely, it is easy to make a reasonable case for why producing so much carbon should be acceptable. The world's problem is that if everyone justifies individual activities but no one changes, then the global production of carbon will continue escalating out of control. I am encouraged that the majority of the feedback I have so far received on my article on the carbon footprint of polar research (*InfoNorth*, June 2009) has been overwhelmingly positive and supportive for change. There is a wide range of options for polar scientists to reduce their individual carbon footprints while continuing all of their essential research, but as Mr. Frisch indicates, these are not one-size-fits-all, and each of us will need to find solutions that work for a unique individual situation. In my own case, switching from gasoline and propane to solar power has been highly effective in northern research camps. I have done extensive fieldwork in both Robinson and JetRanger helicopters; for my applications, the performance is equivalent, and the Robinson leaves half the carbon footprint. Community-based projects that engage and empower local people in research have been highly successful at reducing my carbon footprint of research travel from the south, as well as having many other diverse benefits. My primary point was (and is) that we all need to recognize the issue of carbon footprints in research and begin discussing it openly. I invite researchers to share their carbon footprint reduction success stories and ideas with me to demonstrate a range of options that we can all learn from and share proudly with the world. No one is saying that scientific meetings should grind to a halt, or that northern researchers should revert to walking, but there is no question that it all can be done much better. Alternatives for reducing our reliance on fossil fuels make good economic and environmental sense, even for those who believe that the world is flat and climate change is a myth.

Very best,
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