

19133 **The psychology of climate change: Why people deny the evidence**

Nicole Mortillaro · *CBC News* · Posted: Dec 02, 2018

This week, representatives from more than 150 countries are meeting in Poland, for COP 24, or the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate. Their goal: to find ways to reduce carbon emissions in order to combat the effects of climate change.

Last week, the United States released its National Climate Assessment, which was largely buried in the news as a result of its release over the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday. Its conclusions were in line with those of the UN and other climate organizations.

That same day, U.S. President Donald Trump said he doesn't believe the report. On Thursday, the UN World Meteorological Organization said global temperatures are headed for a rise of 3 to 5°C this century, far above the target of 1.5 to 2°C. The message seems to be clear: Earth's climate is rapidly changing as a result of human activity. So how is it that some people are still reluctant to acknowledge it?

According to some psychologists, there are a number of reasons, including the prevalence of deceptive or erroneous information about the topic. And some recent studies suggest that false news spreads faster than true or objective news. One of the reasons people might be sharing that information — which they may not recognize as false — is that it represents their worldview — a phenomenon called confirmation bias.

There's something else that may be at play at the subconscious level that allows us to disregard the evidence that's in front of us. "A big part isn't the experience; it's the motivation," said Paul Thagard, professor emeritus at the University of Waterloo's Department of Philosophy. Even though there is consensus that climate change is occurring and that humans are exacerbating it, there are still people — including politicians — who refuse to acknowledge the evidence.

"If you're a conservative politician, you just don't want to believe in climate change, because if there really is climate change caused by human activity, then there has to be government actions to stop the disastrous results that are probably going to come down the line in 20 or 30 years."

Another climate change scholar, Matto Mildenerger, says that, while there is a lot of climate change information out there, communicating it in an effective way is key. And it's not about painting a doom-and-gloom scenario. "The trick is to communicate the seriousness of the climate threat ... with a sense of empowering people to take action."