

Forum speaker warns of global warming effects

By Brian Bloch
Emerald Reporter

International energy and resource researcher Chris Flavin said that an accelerated global warming trend will severely affect the planet's climate and ability to sustain life over the next few decades.

During a forum held Saturday, Flavin, the vice president for research at the Worldwatch Institute, said as the Earth ex-

periences a warming trend five to 10 times faster than previously recorded, severe effects on the climate, ecosystem and food producing ability of the planet will be felt worldwide.

"Global warming is an environmental catastrophe on a much grander scale," Flavin said. "We will see drastic temperature changes in the near future."

He explained that global warming, also known as the

greenhouse affect, is the result of the build up of gases in the atmosphere which allow sunlight to penetrate but trap heat close to the planet. The gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, are carbon emissions generated from the burning of fossil fuels.

By studying the effects of fossil fuel consumption, which today is responsible for dumping approximately 5.5 billion tons of waste into the atmosphere a year, Flavin estimated that by the year 2030 the Earth's overall temperature will rise by almost eight degrees Fahrenheit.

He said that while certain areas will be effected more drastically than others, the overall warming trend has proven itself throughout the '80s, with the five warmest years ever recorded occurring during this decade.

"There is a broad scientific consensus that the Earth is getting steadily warmer," Flavin said. "There will be some evidence of warming in most regions throughout the '90s."

He said that regional effects will be especially felt in mid-continent areas such as the North American Midwest and Central Asia. Warming in those areas poses potential threats to crops which cannot adapt to a quickly changing and unpredictable climate.

Crop loss presents obvious problems to an already strained world food supply and may be responsible for rising grain prices, he said.

In addition, Flavin said that trees and forests will also have difficulty adapting to an accelerated climate change, posing potential problems for the eco-

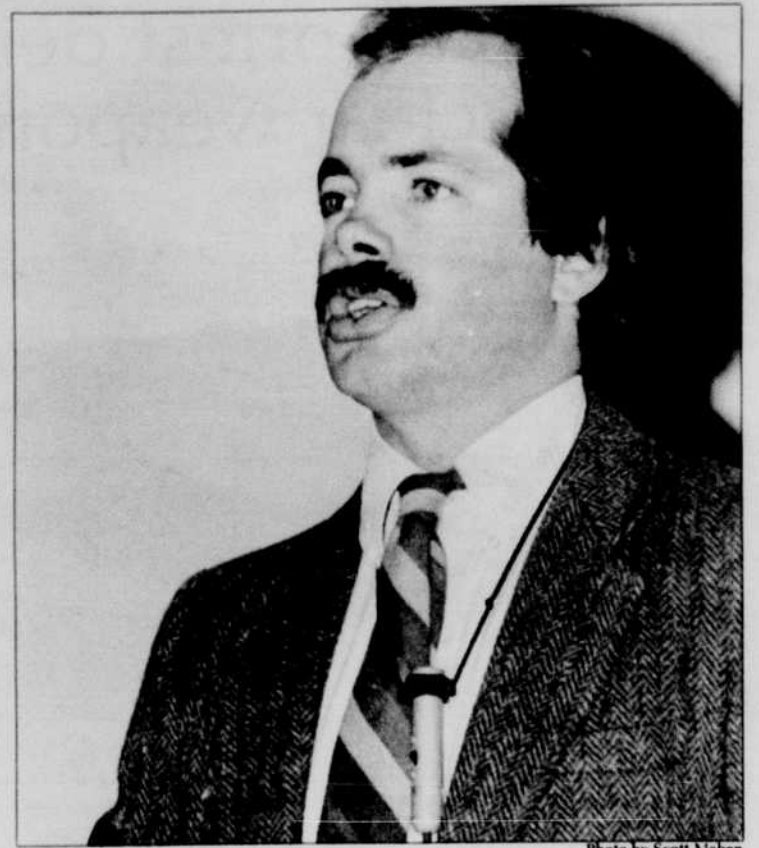


Photo by Scott Maben

Speaker Chris Flavin calls for worldwide cooperation in solving the problem of global warming.

system and forest-using industries.

Warming of the Earth's surface may also cause the sea level to rise as the melting of polar and mountain snow caps contributes water to oceans that are already expanding from the increased temperature. Flavin said that this combination may raise sea level from between 50 to 100 c.m. over the next fifty years, causing flooding and erosion of land masses and threatening fresh water supplies.

"The potential effects of sea level rise are life threatening," Flavin said.

While Flavin said that complete stoppage of the warming trend is impossible, he advocated global cooperation in cutting carbon emissions and increasing energy use efficiency.

In addition to the introduction of three global warming bills last year, Flavin said representatives from 40 countries met last week in Washington D.C. to study the effects of carbon emissions and methods of reducing them.

"No single country can solve the problem of global warming. It is something that every country, no matter how small, contributes to," he said.

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