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Slower winds at SRS may be sign of global warming  
*Upstate lawmakers push for energy alternatives to help clean up air*

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A consequence of global warming may have turned up in the unlikeliest of places: a former bomb-making plant.

Scientists say average wind speeds at Savannah River Site have fallen by about 1 mph over the past 50 years, a change that would be consistent with a warmer atmosphere. The researchers recently published their findings, adding to the mounting evidence that shows the climate is changing.



Some of the new studies have made believers out of two Upstate congressmen who once doubted the science behind global warming.

U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis and U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, both Republicans, say they now support initiatives that would change the way Americans power their cars and light their homes.

**Advertisement** They want drivers to trade in their gas-guzzlers for hydrogen-powered cars, as new nuclear power plants take the place of coal-burning plants. If coal must be used, new technology should make it "clean" burning, Inglis said.

Pushing for alternative energy sources makes for better politics than "continuing to ride on the coattails of big oil," said John Simpkins, a Charleston School of Law professor and a former Furman University political science professor.

"The recent activities in Iraq and the recent increases in the price of gasoline have made this very real and very local to the average voter," he said.

But it's not just politicians paying attention to global warming and the possibility that humans have something to do with it. Businesses are starting to find that going green can bolster the bottom line.

Waste Management's Palmetto Landfill pipes enough methane to BMW's plant in Greer to provide about 25 percent of the plant's energy needs, according to BMW. If the methane weren't captured, it would have to be burned off, which "clearly represents an enormous waste of energy," the company said.

"Methane and carbon dioxide are greenhouse gases believed to contribute to global warming," BMW said in a recent Sustainability Report. "That's why our landfill gas-to-energy operation is so important."

Countless studies, some conflicting, have left unclear how much the Earth is warming and what is to blame, fueling a highly politicized debate.

Some environmentalists have said the planet will be doomed without a steep, immediate reduction in air pollution, while critics contend that Earth is going through a natural cycle and that humans have no effect.

Graham and Inglis said it's a combination of natural and manmade causes.

Taking global climate change seriously can only help, Inglis said.

"If it turns out it's not human causes that's creating the effect, will we have harmed ourselves by trying to clean up the air?" he asked. "I don't think so."

Both congressmen oppose the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement among industrialized nations to reduce greenhouse gases. The United States has opted out of the agreement. Graham and Inglis said the agreement gives China and India an unfair advantage by exempting them.

Global warming has been linked to dying coral reefs in the Caribbean, last year's intense hurricane season, and rising acidity levels in the oceans.

Matt Parker, a meteorologist at Savannah River National Laboratory, said the study he co-authored shows that the average wind speed has fallen from 6 mph to 5 mph in the past half-century at the site near Aiken. Scientists had the information because they monitor wind patterns in case of a radioactive release.

But the study doesn't explain whether the change is manmade or the result of natural causes, Parker said.

"It could be one of these things where it's just another piece of data in a larger puzzle," he said.

Inglis and Graham have traveled to some of the coldest and most remote parts of the planet to get the scoop on the latest global warming research.

Inglis went to the South Pole, where he says he talked to scientists who've drilled deep into the ice and found air pockets showing that carbon levels have increased since the Industrial Revolution.

Graham went to the northern reaches of Alaska and Norway. He talked to Alaskan Eskimo chiefs, who have seen the ice grow thinner, he said. Robins are showing up farther north, he said. There hasn't been enough snow for parts of the Iditarod, Alaska's premier dogsled race, he said.

"I think there's plenty of evidence that fossil fuels we've been using for the past 100 years are beginning to have an effect," Graham said.

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