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Capital Commerce: A greenhouse gas pass

By Marianne Lavelle

There's some new thinking about how to deal with the effects of global warming. Instead of trying to cut back on the use of fossil fuels, which emit greenhouse gases that warm the environment, governments should invest money in specific efforts to deal with the consequences of climate change, says a new study by the **National Center for Policy Analysis**.

The group—funded by individuals, foundations, and corporations, including some, like Exxon Mobil, that have a stake in the global warming debate—estimates that it costs about \$165 billion a year to comply with the Kyoto Protocol, which sets limits on the output of greenhouse gases

such as carbon dioxide among the 155 signatory nations. (The United States has not signed on to the protocol.) But NCPA says that, instead of reducing the burning of fossil fuels like oil and coal, it would be more cost-effective for nations to focus on reducing the increased risks of catastrophes like coastal flooding, hunger, and malaria that may result from global warming. The study says the cost of such "focused adaptive measures" would total just \$10 billion a year.

Kyoto supporters, who advocate carbon dioxide limits, are receptive to the idea. The British, for example, are already undertaking one such project under Prime Minister Tony Blair, a Kyoto backer:

reinforcing and improving the Thames River barrier system, in part to deal with the increased risk of flooding due to climate change. But many feel adaptive measures are not enough.

"Our notion is that you have to mitigate as well as adapt," says Paul Bledsoe, spokesman for the National Commission on Energy Policy, a bipartisan group that has pushed for caps on CO₂ in the United States. Also, given the multibillion-dollar cost of cleanup and relocation in flood-ravaged New Orleans alone, Bledsoe says the NCPA's estimate of \$10 billion annually for building sea walls and other projects around the world is most likely an underestimate.