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## Americans Concerned About Energy Problems, Lack Knowledge to Assess Policies

By Rosanne Skirble

In time for Earth Day, a new survey finds widespread support among Americans for addressing energy problems, but also a lack of basic knowledge that could prevent citizens from making good choices about the nation's and the world's energy future.



Polluting fossil fuels are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions that are linked to climate change

The new data comes from [Public Agenda](#), a non-partisan opinion research group that helps citizens make informed decisions. Scott Bittle, executive vice president of issue analysis, says the [Energy Learning Curve Survey](#) was designed to get a sense of what the public knows, what it values and where it stands on energy issues.

According to the survey, nine in 10 Americans worry about the price of fuel. Eighty-three percent are troubled about American dependence on foreign oil. However, Bittle says, Americans are less concerned about climate change.

"Seventy-one percent say they worry about it, but only 32 percent say they worry a lot," he says.

Americans showed strong

support for tax rebates for energy reduction and for new policies that would require higher gas mileage and energy-efficient new buildings. But Bittle says the analysis also shows that Americans lack basic knowledge about energy issues.

"Four in 10 Americans can't name a fossil fuel. Even more, about half, can't name a renewable energy source," he says.



Solar energy helps power electricity for 12,000 on a military base in Nevada

Bittle says while people say they want alternative energy, "How can they understand something as complex as 'cap and trade,' which has very strong implications for how much they are going to pay and that their local utilities will use?"

Basically, a cap-and-trade system provides economic incentives to reduce global warming emissions. Bittle is concerned that if such a system is put in place, the public may not understand or support it.

He says leaders and the media must work to educate the public so that they know what the policy is and how it affects them. It is not just a question of getting people to accept the policy, Bittle says, "It's a question of engaging them in what the actual choices are."



The US wind power market grew by 45 percent in a single calendar year according to 2008 survey data

The survey is a sober reminder to use grassroots organizing to build public support, according to Josh Dorner, spokesman for the [Sierra Club](#), the nation's oldest and largest environmental group.

"I think [the survey] shows that we have made a lot of progress but still have a lot of work left to do," he says.

Bittle says Americans are ready to move forward on energy. The Energy Learning Curve Survey provides a baseline for better understanding American values and knowledge in the debate over the complex energy issues facing the nation and the world.