

## NEWS BRIEFS

**Uncertainty is no excuse for stalling on climate policy**, agree members of the American Geophysical Union (AGU), the most influential group yet to urge action. In a public statement accessible on the Web ([http://earth.agu.org/sci\\_soc/policy/sci\\_pol.html](http://earth.agu.org/sci_soc/policy/sci_pol.html)), the organization acknowledged that "significant scientific uncertainties" remain in predictions of local effects of climate change, occurrence of extreme weather events, effects of aerosols, changes in clouds, and shifts in precipitation distribution and oceanic circulation. Although scientific uncertainty surrounding the issue "will never be completely eliminated," the group stated that uncertainty "does not justify inaction." AGU therefore "recommends the development and evaluation of strategies such as emissions reduction, carbon sequestration, and adaptation to the impacts of climate change."

**The World Bank has spent 25 times more on climate-changing fossil fuel projects than on renewables since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit**, reports the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, a project of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Moreover, 9 out of every 10 energy and power projects financed by the World Bank benefit transnational corporations based in the wealthy G-7 countries. Many of these corporations are members of the Global Climate Coalition, a U.S.-based lobbying group with members including Exxon, Amoco, Chevron, CMS Energy, and Mobil. The report, *The World Bank and the G-7: Still Changing the Earth's Climate for Business 1997-98*, can be accessed at <http://www.seen.org>.

**The U.S. government wastes over \$51 billion on programs that harm the environment**, claims a report by Friends of the Earth (FOE), Taxpayers for Common Sense, and the U.S. Public Interest Research

Group. *Green Scissors '99: Cutting Wasteful and Environmentally Harmful Spending* recommends cutting 72 federal programs, including coal, petroleum, and diesel research programs (estimated savings: \$1.6 billion), as well as the Army Corps of Engineers' flood control construction program (\$1.25 billion). The report describes why each project is ineffective, money-losing, or a subsidy for wealthy corporations, and suggests alternative actions to address the problems. The report can be found on FOE's Web site: <http://www.foe.org>.



**Most urban children in the developing world inhale the equivalent of two packs of cigarettes each day** just by breathing, according to a study by the World Resources Institute. *Children at Risk from Current Patterns of Global Air Pollution* ranks countries and cities with the most children at greatest risk from degraded air. For children younger than five years, Mexico City topped the list, followed by major cities in China, Iran, India, the Philippines, and Brazil. Noting that respiratory disease is now the leading cause of death in children worldwide, the report blames the burning of carbon-based fuels for creating air pollution levels ranging from 2 to 8 times higher than recommended by the World Health Organization. For a copy, call (202) 662-3484.

**1999 may be the "last chance" for the European Union to pass meaningful ecological tax reform measures**, according to Kai Schlegelmilch, an economist with Germany's Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment, and Energy. After this year's German and Finnish presidencies are over, the European Union (EU) will be led by countries less likely to implement environmental reform,

Schlegelmilch says. Although many EU member states are in various stages of implementing "green" taxes, Schlegelmilch proposes several strategies to overcome lingering opposition, including an assurance that all new energy taxes will be "revenue neutral" and result in corresponding cuts in other taxes. *Energy Taxation in the EU and Some Member States: Looking for Opportunities Ahead* report is available online at ([http://www.wupperinst.org/Publikationen/Taxation/index\\_e.html](http://www.wupperinst.org/Publikationen/Taxation/index_e.html)).

**Most state laws contain enforceable provisions for dealing with nonpoint source discharges**, even though voluntary provisions typically form the core of state water pollution control laws addressing such discharges, concludes a report by the Environmental Law Institute (ELI). *The Almanac of Enforceable State Laws To Control Nonpoint Source Water Pollution* is a detailed state-by-state summary of water pollution control and fisheries laws covering nonpoint sources. In addition, the report identifies laws that impose enforceable requirements on activities such as forestry, agriculture, and development that often result in nonpoint source discharges. For a copy of the report, which was funded in part by EPA, call ELI at (202) 939-3800.

**Two ES&T advisors were recently elected to the National Academy of Engineering:** Richard G. Luthy, Thomas Lord Professor of Environmental Engineering, in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pa.; and Jerald L. Schnoor, University of Iowa Foundation Distinguished Professor at the University of Iowa-Iowa City. Luthy, a former ES&T Advisory Board member, was honored for leadership in the treatment of industrial waste waters, contaminated soils, and aquifers. Schnoor, who currently serves as an ES&T Associate Editor, was honored for research and engineering leadership in the development, validation, and use of mathematical models for global environmental decision making.