



## Senator Feinstein Discusses Air Quality, Climate Change on Earth Day 2004

*Warns of Climate Change's Impact on Western Water Supplies*  
April 22, 2004

**Washington, DC** – The following is a statement by U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (*D-Calif.*) celebrating Earth Day 2004:

**“Mr. President, since the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, we have celebrated this day as an annual occasion on which to examine our nation’s environmental policies. Sadly, there is little to celebrate in terms of environmental protection this year and much to worry about.**

**Just last week, we learned that 474 counties throughout our nation fail to meet air quality standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency. A total of 159 million people – more than half the nation’s population – live in these communities.**

**In my home state of California nearly 90% of State residents live in areas with unhealthy levels of smog. That means that 90% of Californians are at increased risk of asthma, reduced lung function and chronic lung diseases.**

**What’s also alarming is that eight national parks, four of which are in California, contain excessively high levels of ozone. Can you believe that the air in Yosemite, Sequoia, Kings Canyon, and Joshua Tree national parks is harmful to your health?**

**And then there is the gravest threat to our environment and ultimately, our health – global warming. Climate change is the most important environmental issue facing us today.**

**I would like to take a minute now to talk about a likely impact of climate change that has not received very much attention – its effect on our water supplies. The evidence is growing that climate change threatens water supplies throughout the western United States – and especially on the West Coast.**

**Just recently, researchers at the University of California at Santa Cruz analyzed the impact of global warming on Arctic sea ice. What they found was that higher temperatures will cause Arctic Sea ice to melt which will, in turn, reduce the West Coast’s water supply.**

**According to the Santa Cruz scientists' models, melting sea ice will create columns of warmer air that change air flow in the atmosphere and deflect storms and needed precipitation away from Western U.S. lands.**

**Forecasts indicate that Arctic sea ice may shrink by up to 50 percent in summer months by the year 2050. This could have truly devastating consequences for our nation's water supplies.**

**Under the UC-Santa Cruz researchers' models, in 2050, the West Coast, from southern British Columbia to Southern California, could receive 30 percent less rain than it does now. And this is not just a problem for California. The research models show that the melting ice could decrease precipitation as far inland as the Rocky Mountains.**

**The water infrastructure in the West, particularly in California, is already stretched to the limit this year. Even now we are struggling to provide enough water for our communities, farms, forests, fish, and wildlife. What would we do with 30% less precipitation?**

**The Santa Cruz study is not the only one forecasting reduced water supplies in the West. In fact, many global and regional statistical models agree that the West will see reduced snowpack as a result of rising temperatures.**

**Under those models, California and the West will receive more winter rain and less snow meaning two things for Western states – increased flooding in the winter and water shortages in the summer. We are not talking about minor effects.**

**In February of this year, scientists at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory forecasted reductions in snowpack of up to 70 percent in the coastal mountains over the next 50 years as a direct result of warming temperatures.**

**In the West, our water infrastructure is based on the gradual melting of snowpack throughout the spring and summer. A 70 percent decline in snowpack would be catastrophic.**

**The evidence is also mounting that climate change threatens not only our water supplies, but also global biodiversity. A report published in the January edition of the British journal Nature estimates that 25% of Earth's plant and animal species will be wiped out in the next 50 years if global temperatures continue to rise as expected.**

**This means that more than 1 million of the estimated 5 million land species could face extinction within our children's and grandchildren's lifetimes.**

**It is time to take global warming seriously and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The consequences of delaying and deferring decisions are severe. As a country with only 4 percent of the world's population, but which produces 25 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, the United States has a responsibility to act.**

**And yet, there are many steps we can take – steps which are broadly supported – that will help protect the environment.**

**For example, we should continue to promote the production and use of hybrid cars. A few simple steps such as opening up carpool lanes and municipal parking spaces**

**to hybrid cars will encourage motorists to buy these environmentally-friendly automobiles.**

**Congress should also act to bring Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards of light duty trucks and SUVs in line with the requirements for cars. This one action alone could save a million barrels of oil a day and prevent about 200 million tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year.**

**We also know that investments to improve the environment like these pay off. A study released by the President's Office of Management and Budget last fall found that the social and health benefits of enforcing strong clean-air regulations were five to seven times greater than the costs of adhering to the rules.**

**The study estimated that, during the ten-year period from October 1992 to September 2002, between \$120 billion and \$193 billion were saved in reduced hospital stays, emergency room visits, premature deaths and lost workdays as a result of improved air quality.**

**Just as we have asked so many nations around the world to assist us in the War on Terror and in securing and rebuilding Iraq, so, too, should we help those nations who want our assistance in addressing global environmental problems.**

**On this 35th Earth Day we are reminded here in the Congress of the importance of protecting the planet for future generations.**

**It is my hope that we will step up and meet this responsibility."**

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