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Green thinker calls for behavior change

By: Nick Bakshi

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Andreas Kraemer illustrated the disparity between American and European approaches to climate change with a simple anecdote.

"I was staying with an American friend recently, and I had to constantly remind him that he left the lights on when he walked out of rooms," Kraemer, the director of Berlin-based environmental think tank, told about 20 people in MacMillan 115 yesterday.

Kraemer's lecture was the latest in a yearlong series sponsored by the Brown University Environmental Change Initiative. His remarks dealt with transatlantic cooperations on climate, energy and security - three things, he admitted, that are rarely discussed in combination.

Kraemer's think tank, Ecologic, was founded in 1995 and currently employs 75 men and women on more than 10 different projects, including assessing waste management technology and encouraging environmentally friendly farming.

At first, Kraemer focused on the last decade of climate change policy.

He cited the rapid movement of the Greenland ice sheets and melting of Siberian permafrost as key catalysts in the reassessment of current policies and goals. He said that when scientists extrapolated the ice melting currently caused by global warming, they found a sea level rise of as much as nine feet by the end of the century - a daunting prediction which he said could spell the complete elimination of low-altitude island nations such as Tuvalu and the Maldives.

He went on to outline the future of climate change. Right now, the European Union has pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent before 2020, promising to cut emissions by another 10 percent if the United States agrees to match its efforts, Kraemer said.

"This is an opportunity for the U.S. to call the E.U.'s bluff," he added.

Kraemer focused on what he said are unrealistic goals claimed by nations trying to portray themselves as leaders in fighting climate change. Kraemer not only laid out the history of environmental policies and agreements, but explained the unseen national motivations and intentions behind them.

"He looks several layers deep," Nathaniel Manning '08 said.

Kraemer was optimistic that the world can change, saying the challenges involved are not particularly difficult, but that behavior remains a major hurdle.

Drastic changes are necessary in American behavior and mentality, he said. But he admitted there is controversy surrounding policies aimed at behavioral changes and suggested several non-intrusive alternatives.

For instance, right now every new car sold in the United States, he said, must be equipped with the same tires that were used to determine its advertised gas mileage. Car companies, seeking to use gas mileage as a selling point, outfit their cars with low roll-resistance tires to keep this number as high as possible.

But there is no law mandating that replacement tires maintain this low roll resistance, he said, and customers often unknowingly choose tires with higher roll resistance because they are cheaper.

These less efficient tires use more gas and release more harmful emissions, so by mandating factory quality replacement tires, the United States could cut fuel consumption by 8 to 10 percent, Kraemer said.

Simple solutions like this one can have huge environmental impacts, Kraemer said, but they must be implemented. After outlining the complex and twisted history of environmental change, and providing several ideas for the immediate future, he closed with a simple request for his audience, "Let's be sure that we stop negotiating and start acting."

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