

## **260125 Reminder 30.01.26 NfWW No 105 Why deny?**

Sometimes in our work we meet a climate change sceptic, and occasionally an outright denier. And when we do, we are always a little perplexed, given the weight of scientific evidence for human-caused climate change. That – together with what is actually happening across the world with more frequent and increasingly catastrophic weather events.

My initial reaction to sceptics and deniers is to ask myself, ‘What planet are they living on?’ But this will not do. It is really important that we dig a little deeper into the psychology of climate change scepticism and denial. This article sets out in brief what makes it difficult for some people to accept reality.

But first we must acknowledge that to a degree we are all deniers. Even for those of us involved in climate activism, it is not at the forefront of our minds all of the time. If it were we would despair. We have lives to live, jobs to do, families to feed. So, we have to blank it out for some, or even most, of the time.

However, this is very different from those who dispute the truth of the evidence. What is going on with them? I think several things. To begin with it is important to acknowledge that for all of us it is really tough to face up to the sort of future which climate scientists are urging us to face up to, with rising sea levels and increasingly extreme weather – ever more powerful hurricanes, more dangerous heatwaves, wildfires, floods and droughts.

If we are fearful of all this, albeit unconsciously, one strategy is to deny it, and resort to saying that the weather is always changing – it’s nothing new – and certainly neither a cause for concern nor caused by us.

Then there is another fear which comes with this. If we so much as countenance the notion of human causation, then the implications for our ways of living now and in the future may be too uncomfortable to bear.

The thinking runs like this: ‘If I accept that it is true, I shall have to cut down on – or even give up – flying, or eating meat, or driving.’ And questioning what we do impinges on who we are, on our very identity. So, again it’s best to deny it rather than face up to what it means for us.

But denial also requires questioning the science, so alternative sources of information have to be found – and they can be found. There was a tiny handful of scientists and journalists who denied, against overwhelming evidence, that smoking causes cancer. Some of those same people went on to join the climate sceptic-denialist camp.

Finally, denialist thinking is often accompanied by a world view, which is unaware of, or at least does not acknowledge, how bad things are globally, just because they aren’t (yet) too bad here.

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