



White House defends 'health benefits' of climate change

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WASHINGTON (AFP) — The White House on Thursday defended its prediction that climate change would bring some "health benefits" to humans, a forecast unlikely to endear it to critics of the US environmental record.

But a document cited to buttress the claim also warned that the advantages would be "outweighed by the negative health effects of rising temperatures worldwide, especially in developing countries."

On Wednesday, spokeswoman Dana Perino told reporters that US experts were trying to determine "what are going to be the health benefits and the health concerns of climate change, of which there are many." Asked to detail what the benefits would be, Perino replied: "Look, this is an issue where I'm sure lots of people would love to ridicule me when I say this. "But it is true that many people die from cold-related deaths every winter. And there are studies that say that climate change in certain areas of the world would help those individuals," she added. "I'm not an expert."

On Thursday, President George W. Bush's Council on Environmental Quality, which steers the US government's environmental policies, rode to her defense, citing findings by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). "It is important to consider both health risks and health benefits of climate change. We rely on the best available science to guide our policy decision process," said spokeswoman Kristen Hellmer.

Hellmer provided sections of a 2007 IPCC report that cited some possible advantages of climate change, including a drop in deaths from cold and possible curtailing, in some areas, of the spread of infectious disease.

"Studies in temperate areas have shown that climate change is projected to bring some benefits, such as fewer deaths from cold exposure," according to the Summary For Policymakers of the IPCC report.

But "overall it is expected that these benefits will be outweighed by the negative health effects of rising temperatures worldwide, especially in developing countries," it said.

Another section of the report suggested a "mixed" impact on malaria, restricting the range of the deadly mosquito-borne illness in some areas, expanding it in others.



A woman protests against US environmental policy in front of the White House in 2005. The White House on Thursday defended its prediction that climate change would bring some "health benefits" to humans, a forecast unlikely to endear it to critics of the US environmental record.