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Dangers of disinformation

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President George W. Bush's new international anti-malaria campaign has been greeted with enthusiasm by its victims, but with pseudoscience by commentators.

That is not unusual: Fallacies infect every debate about the environment and affect policy, taxpayers' money and victims' lives.

Scientists ask questions, formulate hypotheses, design experiments, look at the evidence, modify the hypotheses and probe further. Then activists, news media and politics take over.

Look at climate change: The public hears again and again that there is scientific consensus, that it's happening now and that we are on the brink of disaster.

This is nonsense. But if we scientists don't yell "Danger!" no one listens. For years, the public has been fed a lousy diet of climate doom and gloom, cooked and served by alarmists who use the language of science to push an agenda. Now, every politician of every stripe must embrace the "climate consensus" or be branded a callous skeptic.

I am not a climatologist, nor an expert on sea level or polar ice. But I do know from talking to many scientists in many disciplines that this consensus is a mirage. Every discipline has many critical, unanswered questions and many dangerous distortions.

I am a specialist in diseases transmitted by mosquitoes. So let's talk malaria. For 12 years, my colleagues and I have protested against the unsubstantiated claims that climate change is causing the disease to spread. We have failed miserably.

Recently, the Associated Press quoted an entomologist claiming an unprecedented outbreak of malaria in Karatina, Kenya, at 1,868 meters. The heart rending article began, "The soft cries of children broke the morning stillness as parents brought them in to the hillside hospital one by one...drained by a disease once unknown in the high country of Kenya."

But there's nothing new about malaria in Karatina. Between World War I and the 1950s, there were 10 disastrous epidemics in the region, and they extended much higher.

We have done the studies and challenged the alarmists, but they continue to ignore the facts.

In November, I was in Nairobi along with thousands of people attending the UN's climate change conference.

I wondered how many had taken anti-malaria tablets because they had seen Al Gore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth," which claims that Nairobi was established in a healthy place "above the mosquito line" but is now infested with mosquitoes — naturally, because of global warming.

Gore's claim is deceitful on four counts. Nairobi was dangerously infested when it was founded; it was founded for a railway, not for health reasons; it is now fairly clear of malaria; and it has not become warmer.

The town's first medical officer, Dr. D.E. Boedeker, wrote that even for the early ivory and slave

caravans, Nairobi "had always been regarded as an unhealthy locality swarming with mosquitoes." In 1904, a committee of doctors "petitioned that the entire municipality be relocated, simply because it was a spawning ground of disease."

Things have changed. My colleagues have looked carefully at climate and malaria records kept by the management staff of nearby highland tea estates, and published their findings in the journal *Nature*.

They found no evidence of long-term climatic change and noted that epidemics of malaria were frequent until the 1950s, when DDT appeared. Malaria's return in the past 20 years has been due to many factors — the effective ban on DDT, deforestation, migration from highly malarious areas, drug and insecticide resistance and above all, poverty.

The alarmists constantly invoke as an authority the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Yet none of those who wrote the sections on malaria have relevant research credentials and several have no scientific credentials at all.

And on it goes. The British government's Stern Review, released with much fanfare in late October, predicted increases in temperature will produce up to 80 million new cases of malaria.

This claim relies on a single article that described a simplistic mathematical model that blithely ignored the most obvious reality: Most Africans already live in hot places where they get as many as 300 infective bites every year, though just one is enough. The glass is already full.

The weather is largely out of our control, but malaria is not. While billions are spent on climate change prevention and by advocacy groups, malaria remains rampant, killing millions, making life a misery for hundreds of millions — like the children of Karatina where the epidemic could easily be eliminated cheaply.

We have to hope that the new "Malaria No More" campaign is based on sound science, unlike the UN's catastrophic current "Roll Back Malaria" scheme, which has presided over a marked increase in victims since 1998.

Pseudoscience will damage your health and your wealth just as surely as malaria.

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