

“GEOENGINEERING IS UNJUST, UNPROVEN AND RISKY”: FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

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Friends of the Earth

WASHINGTON, D.C. - On Tuesday, the National Academy of Sciences released two reports on climate intervention through geoengineering. These reports assess two categories of geoengineering: carbon dioxide removal and sequestration and albedo modification. Although the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed upon a moratorium on geoengineering in 2010, reports such as these indicate that momentum has not slowed and that some continue to grasp at these techno-fixes as viable options to combat climate change.

Geoengineering is the intentional, large-scale technological manipulation of the Earth's systems, including systems related to climate. These technologies generally fall under three broad areas: albedo modification (solar radiation management such as cloud whitening and covering deserts with reflective plastics), carbon dioxide removal and sequestration (such as ocean fertilization, biochar, and carbon extraction machines), and weather modification (such as cloud seeding and storm modification).

The following is a statement from Friends of the Earth Climate and Energy Program Director Ben Schreiber:

Friends of the Earth is committed to fighting climate change through sustainable and just solutions. While we agree that the current level of greenhouse gas emissions leaves us vulnerable to climate chaos, geoengineering will take us in the wrong direction. It serves as a dangerous distraction from the crucial discussions and actions that need to take place to mitigate and adapt to climate disruption.

Geoengineering presumes that we can apply a dramatic technological fix to climate disruption. Instead of facing the reality that we need to drastically reduce our carbon emissions, lower our consumption levels and rapidly transition to renewable energy, some hope to simply reengineer the climate, the land and the oceans to theoretically slow down and reverse climate disruption.

Geoengineering is an attempt by those most responsible for climate disruption to continue polluting instead of committing to the necessary actions and funding needed to help those countries and communities that will be most harmed by climate change.

The side effects of geoengineering interventions are unknown and untested. In order to have any noticeable impact on global temperatures, geoengineering projects would have to be deployed on a massive, global scale. These “experiments” would not only take action in the absence of scientific consensus, hence violating the precautionary principle, but could also easily have unintended consequences due to mechanical failure, human error, inadequate understanding of ecosystems, biodiversity and the Earth's climate, unforeseen natural phenomena, irreversibility or funding interruptions.

These experiments also violate the 2010 moratorium established by the 193 countries who are parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity due to uncertainty around geoengineering's environmental, social, cultural, and economic risks. The UN Environmental Modification Treaty has prohibited the hostile uses of environmental modification since 1976.

Only the few wealthy nations, elite citizens and corporations with immense funding and technology at their disposal could conduct geoengineering experiments. One country's experiments, therefore, could have devastating effects on other countries and the global climate system.

Geoengineering conflicts with sustainable and just solutions to the climate crisis. Real climate justice requires dealing with root causes of climate change, not launching risky, unproven and unjust schemes. Friends of the Earth supports the current moratorium agreed upon through the Convention on Biological Diversity and would condemn any proposals to move geoengineering towards real world experimentation.