Americans’ Belief in Climate Change Down, Polls Find

The number of Americans who believe in the existence of climate change and its causes has fallen since 2008 to its lowest levels since 1997, the nonprofit Resource Innovation Group says in a report reviewing public opinion polls.

“Up until a few years ago, the number of Americans who acknowledge that global warming is real and a threat grew steadily year after year for at least a decade,” the report says, citing Gallup polls. “Such basic acknowledgement of the issue, however, began to drop in 2008 and has reached the point where Americans in 2010 were less likely to believe that global warming was already occurring or would begin shortly than at any time since 1997 when the question was first posed.”

The magnitude of the shift depends on which polls are examined, according to the report, American Climate Attitudes: An Analysis of Public Opinion Trends and Recommendations for Advancing Public Engagement on Global Warming. In a 2008 Pew poll, 71% of respondents said “yes” when asked if they “believe that the earth is getting warmer.” That number dropped to 57% in 2009 and was at 59% in 2010. A Gallup poll conducted each of the last three years asked participants, “When will the effects begin to happen?” In 2008, 61% of respondents said the effects already had begun. In 2009, 53% said the effects had begun, and in 2010 that figure was 50%.

EPA Official Says Agency Working on Dental Amalgam Rule

EPA is working on a rule to reduce mercury discharges from dental facilities and hopes to produce a rule that is “efficient and effective,” an EPA official said. Under the current schedule, EPA will publish a proposed rule in October 2011 and a final rule in October 2012, Jay Pimpare, pretreatment coordinator in EPA Region 1, said at a wastewater pretreatment conference.

The reason for the rulemaking is the prominence of dental offices as a source of mercury in the nation’s rivers and streams, Pimpare said. A 2003 American Dental Association study found that 50% of the mercury entering the nation’s water treatment facilities originates in dental offices, and other studies have reached similar conclusions, he said.

The technology focus of the rule will be amalgam separators, devices that can be installed in dental offices to remove amalgam waste particles from wastewater. Amalgam is a material used for dental fillings that contains a mixture of mercury and other metals. Amalgam separators are “relatively inexpensive” and have proven to be effective at removing 98–99% of mercury from dental office wastewater, Pimpare said.

EPA Not Meeting Requirements for Certain Pollutant Limits, Sierra Club Says

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not promulgated emissions standards for specific pollutants as required by the U.S. Clean Air Act (CAA), an attorney representing the Sierra Club says. Although EPA has said it is meeting the law’s requirements, the Sierra Club has filed a petition for review in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (Sierra Club vs. EPA, D.C. Cir., No. 11-1184, 5/20/11).

The CAA requires EPA to promulgate emissions standards that ensure sources accounting for at least 90% of aggregate emissions of seven hazardous air pollutants are regulated. In addition, it requires EPA to promulgate emissions standards that ensure area sources representing 90% of the aggregate area source emissions of 30 urban hazardous air pollutants are regulated.

The Sierra Club filed lawsuits against EPA in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia in 2001, arguing the agency did not meet the statutory deadline to implement the requirements. A court order then required EPA to comply with the requirements by Feb. 21, 2011. In March, EPA said it had completed sufficient standards to meet the CAA’s requirements. By filing the petition for review, the Sierra Club is arguing EPA has not set specific standards for pollutants, including polychlorinated biphenyls.