



Pacific Institute
for Climate Solutions
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MEDIA RELEASE

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Climate change courses for civil servants – BC sets another first

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) has today announced the launch of an innovative series of online climate change short courses for civil servants and British Columbians. Throwing the old-fashioned textbook approach out the window, “Climate Insights 101” uses a combination of animation, interviews and click-thrus to engage people on the basic concepts and findings of climate science research.

Today’s 10 a.m. official launch by Environment Minister Terry Lake at the Institute of Public Administration of Canada’s 63rd annual conference in Victoria sees the first of four planned modules in the series become available online at www.pics.uvic.ca. These courses, targeted for civil servants, are the first of their kind.

PICS Executive Director Dr. Tom Pedersen says the courses provide a vital bridge between the scientific community and BC’s 26,000 civil servants who help inform and shape the province’s policies and planning. “People who don’t work in science are often intimidated by it, so these courses will go a long way towards demystifying the physics of the climate change we are seeing. It makes traditionally tough subject matter accessible as well as entertaining.”

Lake says building a solid knowledge base within the province’s civil service is essential because climate change will impact not only the environment but also the economy, the way we live, how we use our land and water, and what our future agricultural options are. “BC is already a world leader in mitigating and preparing for climate change and these courses will help ensure we maintain that momentum.”

Module one, entitled “Climate Science Basics” consists of an introduction and four, 30-minute lessons on: CO2 and the greenhouse effect; climate change and Mother Nature’s influence; observable changes; and introduction to climate modelling.

A useful menu feature allows participants to click on specific subjects or questions, rather than having to go through the entire lesson from start to finish. Participants can also choose how in-depth they wish to go, having the option of an overview or a “learn more” function. Most lessons contain a “Clear the Air” segment that explores and corrects common misconceptions about climate change. These are on YouTube www.youtube.com/user/PICSClimateInsights.

Module one’s content has been provided by climate change experts Pedersen and Dr. Francis Zwiers, director of UVic’s Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change contributor. Environment Canada and the BC Ministry of Environment have also provided input.

Pedersen says the courses have a strong BC context but the global scope of the science makes it relevant to a wide audience. “I anticipate that schools, media and general society, as well as the target audience of people working in local government or ministries, will find the series invaluable for clarifying what is too often seen as a difficult or complicated issue.” Module two (regional climate change and its impacts), module three (adaptation) and module four (mitigation) are currently in production and are planned for release next year by PICS.

PICS is hosted and led by the University of Victoria in collaboration with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and the University of Northern British Columbia.

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Backgrounder – PICS Climate Insights 101 short courses:

Today has seen the launch of the first of four modules in the PICS “Climate Insights 101” short course series. Module one (Climate Science Basics) is now available online. Next year will see the launch of module two (regional climate change and its impacts), module three (adaptation) and module four (mitigation). Module one includes the following content:

Introduction to the Climate Insights 101 series: Goals

- promote an understanding of the scientific basis for changes in Earth’s climate, both natural and human-induced
- investigate some of the common misconceptions that people may have about global warming
- provide an overview of climate change adaptation and mitigation actions and plans within BC and elsewhere
- encourage participants to evaluate and reduce their carbon footprint at work and at home

Lesson 1: CO₂ and the Greenhouse Effect

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- explain the greenhouse effect and its global impact
- name and describe the relative importance of each of the major greenhouse gases
- describe how “water vapour feedback” impacts global warming, and
- explain the difference between incoming solar and outgoing infrared radiation

Lesson 2: Climate Change: Mother Nature’s Influence

By the end of this lesson participants should be able to:

- discuss the impact on the climate from changes in the earth’s orbit, volcanic eruptions, and El Niño/La Niña effects
- explain the importance of ice core samples for determining the history of climate, and
- explain why it is not the sun and changes in its output that are responsible for temperature trends over recent decades

Lesson 3: Observable Changes

In this lesson participants will come to understand how change is occurring worldwide because of our actions and be able to provide concrete examples of what climate change looks like. The observations include:

- evidence of melting alpine glaciers
- changes in the seas in the form of Arctic sea ice loss, and
- a warming ocean, rising sea level, and in addition, progressive acidification of the ocean, a serious side-effect of carbon dioxide addition to the atmosphere

Lesson 4: Introduction to Climate Modeling

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- describe what climate models are in general terms
- describe how climate models are used to understand climate change in the past, and
- discuss what climate change projections tell us about the need for adaptation and the climatic impact on emissions reductions

“Climate Insights 101” courses are free and available online at www.pics.uvic.ca for educational purposes. The courses have been fully funded by PICS.

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions was established in 2008 with a \$90 million endowment from the BC government.