



## MEETINGS:review

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OPINION Andrew Williams: Why climate change doesn't matter

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by Andrew Williams



**As all attention turns to Copenhagen to see whether the world is more Monbiot than Palin, Andrew Williams says that climate change or no climate change the meetings and events industry should be altering the way it does business.**

The eyes of the world have been on Copenhagen for the past few days. As countries from around the globe hammer out a deal on climate change, the arguments and counter arguments may seem so bewildering as to defy reason. When it comes to how any of this affects the events industry, the picture is even less clear.

Is climate change really happening? If it is, then is mankind to blame? Is George Monbiot right, and we need urgent, global action if disaster is to be averted? Is Sarah Palin right, and the whole thing has been cooked up by some power-crazed boffins in East Anglia? Is there anything we can do about it given the complexity of the problem and the bickering over potential solutions?

### Managing resources

It really doesn't matter. I don't care whether you think climate change is happening or not, or whether it's caused by human actions. Pretty soon we are going to run out of coal and gas, and unless we can make a shift now to a more sustainable society, we are all going to have a very bumpy landing when that happens. My belief is that sustainability is about more than a niche green vision, or an approach that forces us all to go back to living in caves. Sustainability is a moral issue, and should be treated as such.

So, for example, I believe that it is morally indefensible to waste resources. This applies whether that resource is finite, like oil and coal, or seemingly infinite like solar and wind power. We have a responsibility as supposedly intelligent creatures to manage what the planet gives us in a sustainable way. Within the events industry we can take responsibility for the areas we have control over. If we're a client we can press our suppliers to work within our policies. If we're suppliers we should be offering sustainable solutions as a standard rather than an optional extra. The argument about whether sustainability needs to come from the top down or the bottom up is academic – we all need to do more, right now.

### Spreading the blame

One of the great failures of the environmental movement over recent years has been that it criticises those who do a little far more than those who do nothing at all. So an organisation which sets, say, a limit on flights for top executives will not get any praise – instead they're treated with contempt for flying at all. No such criticism is levelled at those who do nothing and carry on regardless. That's not an excuse for inaction or a license to greenwash, and I think we're all becoming wiser to those companies who simply want to pull the wool over our eyes. But we need to welcome small changes as well as large changes – and push for the former to breed the latter.

So climate change shouldn't matter – we need change anyway. Of course, personally, I have no doubt that man-made global warming is an imminent threat to all of us, and we need to start changing more things, more quickly, if we're to succeed in turning that around. November's edition of Scientific American carried a very simple, but very well researched, article explaining how all of the world's power could come from sustainable energy by 2030, using existing technology. We have the solutions in our hands. The politicians have a window of opportunity at Copenhagen. We in the

events industry are a small cog in a much bigger global picture, but unless we make our voice heard and show leadership we risk being marginalised.

Edmund Burke once wrote: "No-one makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he could only do a little." Let's support those making changes, however small, and build the momentum for a more sustainable events industry.

*Andrew Williams is managing director of Seventeen Events*

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