

In February, I [wrote about](#) the quandary of how to refer to the effects of increased atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases so as to better communicate the seriousness of the problem and reach new audiences (recognizing that “global warming” is both too mild-sounding and politically polarized, and “climate change” isn’t much better).

How about the phrase “our deteriorating atmosphere” as a substitute? An initially-confidential [report from ecoAmerica](#) on how to communicate about climate change was released last week, parts of it having been leaked a while back (inspiring [this](#) NY Times story and [this](#) Climate Progress post). From page 12 of the report:

Deteriorating atmosphere is the strongest phrase to describe changes in our weather and climate. Pollution and climate deterioration and endangered atmosphere are also strong, though with somewhat less intensity. Our deteriorating atmosphere is very powerful because it captures pollution, ozone depletion (which people worry about), and global warming all wrapped into one. It outperforms other phrases that refer to shifting weather patterns and it is also preferable because it is more evocative, briefer, and readily remembered. Deteriorating atmosphere also readily links to health, which is some of our strongest messaging.

The report is based on two focus groups, an online survey of 1000 registered voters, and a telephone survey of another thousand. The links it suggests making to values like family health, the American can-do spirit, and clean energy are undeniably powerful.

But did they get it right about “deteriorating atmosphere”? To me, the phrase seems a little space-age, remote, and techy, like something’s gone wrong with the filters at [Biosphere 2](#) and only some pointy-headed scientists can save us. It also continues the legacy of ignoring or downplaying non-climate impacts of GHG gases, like [ocean acidification](#). What do you think?

