

It sometimes takes awhile for journals to reach my desk as they circulate among faculty, so this isn't hot off the presses. But I've been looking at some recent issues of *JEEM* (the *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*), and I found a number of very interesting articles. Fully grasping the articles would require a deep dive into the math, a deeper dive than many of us have time (or skills) for. But it's possible to get the gist of the papers without doing so. Here is a sample of the most interesting findings:

Optimal Learning on Climate Change: Why Climate Skeptics Should Reduce Emissions, 70 JEEM 17 (2015) (by Wijnbergen & Willems). This article by two Oxford economists provides a model in which the rational decision for non-believers in climate change is to support emissions reductions. The reason is that information about climate science is valuable, and changing the level of emissions provides information about how the system works. Note that this model assumes a rational climate change skeptic.

Indoor Air Quality and Academic Performance, 70 JEEM 14 (2015) (by Stafford). A study by a Welsh economist finds that improvements in indoor air quality in a Texas school district's buildings were associated with improvements in standardized test scores. In fact, improving the air quality inside schools, the author found, might be a more cost-effective way to improve school performance than decreasing class sizes. Indoor air quality is an issue environmental scholars tend to ignore — we think of the environment as being “outside” — but in the modern world people spend most of their time breathing air indoors. This is an issue that deserves more attention from environmental scholars, although it does get a lot of attention in public health schools.

On Sustainability and Social Welfare, 71 JEEM 34 (2015) (by Floeubaey). The concept of sustainability is often attacked as hopelessly vague. This paper defines it in terms of leaving later generations the option of achieving certain targets if they choose to do so. The math is complicated — that's true of the first article as well — but defining sustainability in terms of preserving options is an intriguing idea.

By the way, I think that many in the environmental law community think of environmental economics as inherently biased against regulation. As these papers indicate, that's really a caricature of the kind of work being done today.