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Government and Industry Experts unite to make IMechE energy reception a success

Hundreds of academics, MPs, and industry leaders from the world of energy and manufacturing converged at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers' (IMechE) in London earlier this year (2005), making its first Parliamentary Reception on energy a huge success.

But guest speaker Chris Leigh, the Government's Head of National Climate Change Policy, said some experts now believe global warming is as threatening as terrorism in its consequences. IMechE held its 'Energy in a Changing Climate' to highlight the proactive work of mechanical engineering in protecting the climate.

Mr Leigh, who has built up over 25 years' of experience with DEFRA, told the audience the Kyoto Protocol (brought into force that week) was "a step in the right direction" but much more was needed to be done to reach its targets: "Climate change is real and it is happening now. The 10 hottest years on record have occurred since 1990, including each year since 1997 and 1998 was the warmest year globally, and the impact relating to that is severe. "Kyoto targets include cutting greenhouse gases by 12.5% by 2012 and carbon dioxide by 20% by 2010, but by 2050 the Government wants them cut by 60%. Britain has broken the link between economic growth and reducing emissions but one of our key concerns remains in tackling transport pollution, especially aviation."

IMechE President, Bill Edgar, CBE, said: "There is tremendous scope for mechanical engineers to develop low and zero carbon technologies and, regardless of climate change, to improve energy efficiency and reduce our dependency on the world's finite, and diminishing supplies, of fossil fuels. It is important to recognise that tackling climate change requires action on many fronts."

He added: "Mechanical engineers have already made giant strides in improving the efficiency of machines and systems that derive their energy from fossil fuels. Developments in combustion processes and lightweight materials, for example, have led to dramatic improvements in the fuel consumption of passenger cars and aircraft. They have also been at the forefront of developments in renewable power, developing turbines and blades, which can convert energy from wind into electricity." Another example is how they have developed innovative and more efficient systems to heat, cool and ventilate buildings. Low carbon car engines and the development of combined, heat and power (CHP) in domestic systems are just two examples of how mechanical engineering skills can pave the way for a healthier environment.

MPs and Lords from all over the country supported the event along with major companies such as Siemens, Alstom, Rolls Royce, and the Nuclear Industry Association.

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A weekly poll carried out by the IMechE, the leading global voice for the profession, asked how important mechanical engineering is in tackling climate change. An overwhelming 87% said it was very important, 10.5% said it was, but in a small way, and the remainder, 2.5% said it was not important at all.

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