

# Energy and Resources Group Spring 2012 Colloquium Series (ER295)

## February 15, 2012



### **Professor Robert Socolow**

Co-Director, The Carbon Mitigation Initiative  
Director, Siebel Energy Grand Challenge,  
Princeton Environmental Institute  
Princeton University

**What would we be doing if we were taking  
climate change seriously?**

**110 Barrows Hall / 4:00 p.m.**

The world's diplomats and environmentalists have endorsed a target that is unlikely to be achieved, yet a consensus could develop around less difficult goals requiring major national commitments, international coordination, and iterative risk management. Toward that end, I describe new ways to communicate with smart, skeptical, apolitical people. Three revisions to current messaging should be considered. 1) The news of climate change is unwelcome: we'd all rather live on a planet so large that we could not disrupt it. 2) Action can be motivated by what we don't know, as by what we do know. Climate science cannot rule out the early arrival of nasty outcomes, for which, in other domains, we buy insurance. 3) Some responses to climate change are dangerous, and all responses need to be scrutinized for undesirable side-effects – we don't want to choose cures that are worse than the disease. Compare these messages with the usual assertion that climate change is mostly about green jobs and innovation, that climate science is definitive, and that government will screen out bad policies.