

Why Climate Change Threats Don't Trigger An Immediate Response From Human Brains

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AILSA CHANG, HOST:

So I turned to Dan Gilbert. He's a psychologist at Harvard, and he focuses on the human mind, not climate change. But it turns out those two things are totally connected when it comes to explaining why people don't do more about the environment. He wrote about this all the way back in 2006, but what he said then still holds up today. Gilbert argued that climate change lacks four fundamental features that typically trigger an immediate response. And those features all start with the letter I, so bear with us.

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DAN GILBERT: The human brain, you've got to remember, is a fantastic threat detector. The problem is that the brain is especially attuned to threats from agents.

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CHANG: Your point is that climate change isn't this personal, deliberate assault against us by other humans.

GILBERT: Exactly. There's no evildoer. I mean, just imagine that the things happening today in the United States with regard to climate were a nefarious plot by the Iranians. We'd be dropping nuclear bombs. But when it's the climate, which doesn't seem like it's a person at all, we just kind of ho and hum.