

Dr James Hansen is Edinburgh Medal Winner



Edinburgh Medal to be awarded later today.

The recipient of the 24th Edinburgh Medal, Dr James Hansen, the American climate scientist who is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, an adjunct professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University and at Columbia's Earth Institute will speak in Edinburgh tonight.

Perhaps best known for bringing global warming to the world's attention in the 1980's when he first testified before Congress, Dr Hansen's background in both space and earth sciences gives him a broad perspective on the status and prospects of our home planet.

Hansen admits that if it hadn't been for his grandchildren, and the knowledge of what they would face, he would have concentrated on the pure science, and not persisted in taking a public position pointing out the challenges that humanity faces. It is this message that he brings to Edinburgh when he presents climate change as a moral issue of unprecedented scale. Described by Al Gore as 'the scientist with the most powerful and consistent voice calling for intelligent action to preserve our planet's environment.' Hansen believes that while today's adults obtain benefits from fossil fuel use, the consequences will be felt mainly by young people and future generations as well as the fellow species with which we share our planet.

More than 30 years ago Hansen, who is 70, and his team created one of the first global climate models and used it to predict much of what has happened in the climate since. Hansen has now concluded, on the basis of analyses of Earth's climate history

and global observations made by other scientists, that the threats posed by global warming have increased markedly because of the absence of effective policies. Unless prompt action is taken to place a rising price on carbon emissions – by collecting a fee from fossil fuel companies and distributing the funds to the public – the planet will be committed to devastating consequences borne upon today's young people.

Dr Hansen say:- “I am honoured to receive the Edinburgh Medal and I hope that I can use the occasion to draw attention to the urgency of addressing climate change, with a different approach, one that would be effective. Our parents did not know that their actions could harm future generations. We will only be able to pretend that we did not know.”

Dr Simon Gage, Director of the Edinburgh International Science Festival, said “We are truly delighted to award the 2012 Edinburgh Medal to a scientist whose tireless and principled voice has had such an impact on the climate debate. His advocacy around the most pressing issue of our time and his insistence that he has a duty to society as well as to science makes him an outstanding recipient. “

The Edinburgh Medal is a prestigious award given each year to men and women of science and technology whose professional achievements are judged to have made a significant contribution to the understanding and well-being of humanity. The Medal is supported by the City of Edinburgh Council and SEPA and will be awarded at a ceremony later today.

The Rt. Hon. George Grubb, Lord Lieutenant and Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh, said: “Dr Hansen is an extremely worthy recipient of the Edinburgh Medal. An internationally lauded scientist, he has worked tirelessly to highlight the grave risks posed to our planet by the effects of climate change. Indeed, through his efforts, Dr Hansen has been instrumental in bringing climate change to the forefront of the global

political agenda.”

The Vote of Thanks, following the Edinburgh Medal Address: The Case for Young People and Nature, will be given by Professor James Curran, MBE, Chief Executive of SEPA, who has worked in environmental science and regulation for 30 years.

Professor James Curran, MBE, Chief Executive of SEPA said “Climate change is arguably the most severe threat facing our planet today. It is already affecting us all and seems destined to worsen for generations to come. James Hansen can take the credit for having brought the issue of climate change to the world’s attention, often in the face of personal attack. All of us have a responsibility to take action to adapt to its implications and, even more urgently, to do all that we can to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support international action. For his foresight, commitment and courage, James is a very worthy recipient of the Edinburgh Medal, and I am delighted that SEPA has been able to support the award.”

Tickets for the Medal Address are sold out but Dr Hansen is taking part in two other great festival events with some of the country’s most important voices on climate change. Tickets for ‘Our Climate Future’ with Lord Anthony Giddens and Professor Pete Smith, Science Director of Scotland’s Climate Change Centre of Expertise, and for ‘Fixing the Planet’ with, among others, Professor Stuart Haszeldene OBE, are available from www.sciencefestival.co.uk or 0844 557 2686

The first Edinburgh Medallist in 1989 was the theoretical physicist and Nobel Prize winner Abdus Salam; of the subsequent twenty Medallists, three have gone on to be awarded the Nobel Prize.