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Insurance Regulators Tackle Climate Change Through New Task Force

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. March 14 (BestWire) — A new task force of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners is working to increase awareness of climate change in the industry.

The group starts up at a time when climate change is a leading concern of insurers.

"We want (insurers) to be healthy, we want them to be still engaged in the business 10 years from now," said Nebraska Insurance Commissioner Tim Wagner, co-head of the task force. "If there's going to be a change for business, it's better to plan for that change than not."

Those who accept the concept of climate change believe it to be responsible for warming oceans, which might be linked to an increase in the frequency and severity of hurricanes. It's also linked to other extreme conditions, such as drought, tornadoes, brush fires and hailstorms.

But not all insurers or regulators have been converted to the line of thinking, Wagner said.

"This is one of those issues that seems to polarize people. There are those that believe and those that don't," he said.

Wagner's hope is that the new task force not only increases awareness but includes discussions on land-use policies and advocating for stronger and better-enforced building codes.

So far, industry representatives appear optimistic.

"As people gain a better understanding of what climate change is and how it impacts insurance losses, that may be helpful for the regulators to better understand when companies ask for rating changes," said Don Griffin, a spokesman for the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America.

It's among the most serious issues the industry faces, he said. "I'm sure what companies will be doing is examining what kind of impact warming trends would have and what impact that has on their book of business. How do they change their business plan?"

According to Evan Mills, a staff scientist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California, regulators can help safeguard insurers' solvency in a changing climate while also helping to maintain a healthy market.

"NAIC's engagement in the climate change discussion helps dispel the old myth that responding to the threat of climate change is contrary to the interests of the business community," Mills said in an e-mail to BestWire.

Andrew Logan, insurance program director of the Ceres investor coalition, said the new task force represents a good first step in engaging the industry in finding solutions.

"Insurance as we know it is threatened by a perfect storm of rising weather losses, rising global temperatures and more Americans than ever living in harm's way," Logan said in a statement.
(By Eleanor Barrett, senior associate editor, BestWeek: eleanor.barrett@ambest.com) BN-NJ-03-14-2006 1625 ET #

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