

# Slate

My life.  My card.

My Wishlist is here.  
New indulgences offered daily.

INDULGE ME NOW



SEARCH

Home Enter The Fray

News & Politics

Arts & Life

Business & Tech

Health & Science

Style & Shopping

Travel & Food

Sports

Slate on NPR

PRINT

DISCUSS

E-MAIL

NEWSLETTERS

RSS

PODCASTING

BLOGS +

PRESS BOX

Bush or Keller?

KAUSFILES

Beyond Kosola!

THE HAS-BEEN

Not a Boom, But a Whimper

**Discovery CHANNEL**

KING TUT'S MYSTERY TOMB OPENED

SUNDAY, JULY 9TH 9PM E/P

CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE

Slate  
SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

THE BEST OF Slate

THE BEST OF Slate ANTHOLOGY

Now in convenient book form.

PODCASTS

ENTER THE FRAY: OUR READER DISCUSSION FORUM.

## Topic: Science: Jul 1 2006 6:39PM

◀ Previous Next ▶ Reply More By This User Block This User

**Subject:** Corrections to Easterbrook's article  
**From:** evanmills  
**Date:** Jul 1 2006 6:39PM

Note: This was submitted to Slate for consideration as a "correction" or counterpoint article, but they declined on both counts.

Submitted to Slate  
July 1, 2006

Double Smash  
Actually, it's the Combination of Climate Change and Rising Human Exposure That Should Worry Us

A June 20, 2006 article in Slate by Gregg Easterbrook raised the important question of climate change "attribution" – specifically, are the skyrocketing costs of natural disasters due to human-induced climate change and/or other factors, such as increased population and rising property values along U.S. coastlines?

Much to his credit, the author counts himself <<http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/easterbrook/20060524.htm>> among those who have switched from "skeptic to convert" on the question of global warming. However, the author seriously misquoted and misconstrued the findings of our study <[http://www.ceres.org/pub/docs/Ceres\\_insure\\_climatechange\\_120105.pdf](http://www.ceres.org/pub/docs/Ceres_insure_climatechange_120105.pdf)> for Ceres on the implications of climate change for insurance availability and affordability, by implying that we attribute all rising costs to climate change. In fact, we stated clearly that rising financial losses are due to a combination of demographic/socioeconomic factors and climate change and that the latter were in likely the dominant factor. Indeed, a gathering of international experts with divergent views on the topic was hosted by Munich Re this past May and concurred that both forces are at work. <<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v441/n7094/full/441674a.html>>

Additionally, our analysis relied primarily on inflation-corrected costs, not "current dollars", as Easterbrook stated incorrectly in his article. [note: remarkably, Slate's editors say that because an incorrect definition of 'current dollars' is often used in the popular media they do not feel compelled to make a correction.] Easterbrook quoted us as saying that non-inflation-corrected average losses have increased from \$5 billion per year to \$15 billion per year since the 1970s. Actually, we stated that the average annual losses have increased from \$1 billion to \$20 billion, and that is after correcting for inflation (and prior to Hurricane Katrina). These data exclude many small-scale events that would make the differential even greater. In one instance where we consciously used current dollars in a chart, we took care to plot the data next to an inflation trend line, thereby making the role of inflation unambiguous.

More on the attribution discussion can be found here <<http://eetd.lbl.gov/emills/PUBS/PDF/Mills-Pielke.Jr.pdf>>, including the point that enormous effort and expenditure has served to dampen losses over what they would otherwise have been. Easterbrook concludes by saying that "insurance losses are peripheral to global-warming question. As outlined in a recent article in the journal Science <[http://eetd.lbl.gov/emills/PUBS/Insurance\\_Science.html](http://eetd.lbl.gov/emills/PUBS/Insurance_Science.html)>--and in the Ceres report--we are not so sanguine.

The bottom line ... The sharp up-tick in catastrophic losses in recent years has far outstripped both real economic growth and population growth. Citizens, companies, governments, and insurers have good reason to be worried that rising damages caused by the movement of humans into harm's way are being compounded by the effects of climate change.

Sincerely,  
Evan Mills, Ph.D.  
Richard Roth, Jr.  
Eugene Lecomte

Jul 1 6:39PM evanmills Corrections to Easterbrook's article

Update Your Blocked User List

*listen to slate podcasts*

**EXPLAINER: DID  
STRESS KILL KEN  
LAY?**

click to play audio

**DO I WANT A  
GOOGLE PC?**

click to play audio

editor's pick

**SPOILING THE  
MOVIES**

---

---

**FEATURED  
ADVERTISER LINKS**

**REFINANCE RATES  
AS LOW AS 2.9% -  
FREE QUOTES**