



William E. Rees Presents 15th Annual Sewell Lecture

William E. Rees, PhD, FRSC, a professor at the University of British Columbia School of Community and Regional Planning, presented the 15th Annual Sewell Lecture on April 10. The lecture, entitled “Humanity’s Fatal Success and the Myth of Sustainability,” was sponsored by the Mailman School’s Department of Environmental Health Sciences. Dr. Rees spoke about human ecology, ecological economics, “ecological footprint analysis,” and his recently co-authored book, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*.

Dr. Rees cautioned that “a great change in our stewardship of the earth is required if human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.” He pointed out that the human population is so large that if we do not change our current consumption patterns, there will be food and water shortages on a massive scale with horrific repercussions, including natural disasters and deadly disease outbreaks. He cited the example that if the entire world’s population had the same consumer habits as we have in the U.S., “it would take four additional earth-like planets to accommodate everyone sustainably.”

Dr. Rees suggests that while we have the technology available to reduce our energy consumption, which actually would improve our quality of life, we do not choose to do so, and instead “hold on to the expansionist myth.”

The Sewell Lectureship is an annual event at which alumni, students, faculty, and friends have an opportunity to come together for a scientific presentation and a social gathering by a distinguished lecturer in environmental sciences.