

Human Activity Driving Extremes of Weather

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“Human activity has driven not just global warming but also increases in some extreme weather and climate events around the world,” the American magazine, “Science,” reports in its Nov. 25th issue.

“It is likely that” human influences have raised the highest and lowest temperatures in a day on a global scale,” says the magazine, summarizing the new special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change(IPCC), an organization founded by the UN’s World Meteorological Organization(WMO).

As the greenhouse intensifies, “Tropical cyclone maximum wind speeds are likely to increase, the report says, droughts will intensify in some regions, and sea level will continue to rise, flooding low-lying coastal areas,” writes Richard Kerr of “Science.”

The IPCC report finds it is likely that the number of cold days and nights has decreased since 1950. “In many regions,” Kerr writes, again citing the report, “there is medium confidence that the length or number of warm spells, or heat waves, has increased.”

At present, 2011’s heat is the equal of the 10th highest year on record—and the 13 warmest years have all occurred between 1997 and 2011, the WMO says.

In China, says a related article in the same issue, glaciers have receded 10% over the past 60 years, while average land surface temperatures rose by 1.38 degrees centigrade between 1959 and 2009.

“Future prospects are even grimmer,” says “Science,” as “Sea levels off the coast of Shanghai are predicted to rise up to 148 millimeters by 2050.”

The IPCC report says that so far it is not global warming but the

concentrations of people in harm’s way that is pushing up economic losses. “More and more people have been living in the path of disastrous weather, whether poor people with nowhere else to live but low-lying deltas or the rich flocking to the coastlines,” Kerr writes.

Author and environmental activist William deBuys, who warns that an “Age of Thirst” is coming to the American Southwest, points out that the recent wildfires have set all-time records in Texas, (3.6 million acres), Arizona, (538,000 acres) and New Mexico (156,000 acres).

Author of “A Great Aridness,”(Oxford University Press) deBuys writes, “The simple rule of thumb for climate change is that wet places will get wetter and dry places drier. One reason

the dry places will dry is that higher temperatures mean more evaporation. In other words, there will be ever less water in the rivers that keep the region's cities (and much else) alive. Modeling already suggests that by mid-century surface stream-flow will decline by 10% to 30%."

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, the nonprofit science advocacy headquartered at Cambridge, Mass., "Sea levels are rising and glaciers are melting; record high temperatures and severe rainstorms and droughts are becoming increasingly common."

The IPCC panel recommends "low-regrets measures," Kerr writes, across a broad spectrum ranging from improved drainage systems to better early warning systems to improving water supplies. He quotes Thomas Wilbanks of Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, a lead author of the report, as saying, "there are things that we can—and should—be doing now to increase our resilience." Is Corporate America listening? Is Washington listening?

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