

In Our View: Reminder of climate change blows into county

The Columbian (Vancouver, Washington)

September 9, 2020 Wednesday

Copyright 2020 The Columbian Publishing Co. All Rights Reserved

Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. A4

Length: 584 words

Highlight: Whether the weather be fine or whether the weather be not, we are seeing the effects of ***climate change***.

In Clark County, the impact was felt Monday evening as high winds carried smoke from Eastern Washington wildfires into Western Washington. Air quality was in the "Very Unhealthy" category, according to the Washington Department of Ecology, with a palpable haze settling over the region.

Body

Whether the weather be fine or whether the weather be not, we are seeing the effects of ***climate change***.

In Clark County, the impact was felt Monday evening as high winds carried smoke from Eastern Washington wildfires into Western Washington. Air quality was in the "Very Unhealthy" category, according to the Washington Department of Ecology, with a palpable haze settling over the region.

The blazes that produced the smoke devastated the town of Malden, destroying an estimated 80 percent of homes and businesses in the community about 35 miles south of Spokane. The fire station, post office, City Hall and library were lost, and Whitman County Sheriff Brett Myers said: "The scale of this disaster really can't be expressed in words. The fire will be extinguished but a community has been ***changed*** for a lifetime."

Similar scenarios are being repeated throughout the United States because of unusual or unprecedented weather events. Residents of the Gulf Coast recently suffered through a tropical storm followed almost immediately by a hurricane; Denver on Tuesday faced a winter weather advisory two days after a high temperature of 101 degrees; and wildfires are devastating the western United States. California already has set a record with more than 2 million acres burned this year - and months remain in the fire season.

Hilary Franz, Washington's commissioner of public lands, wrote of our state: "Thousands of homes are without power. Many families have had to evacuate their homes and many homes have been lost. We're still seeing new fire starts in every corner of the state."

Wildfires are a fact of life for the heavily forested Northwest. But ***climate change*** has caused those fires to increase in frequency and intensity in recent years. As the Center for ***Climate*** and Energy Solutions explains: "Research shows that ***changes*** in ***climate*** that create warmer, drier conditions, increased drought, and a longer fire season are boosting these increases in wildfire risk. Warmer temperatures and drier conditions can help fires spread and make them harder to put out."

For the short term, the National Weather Service has issued a red-flag warning for critical fire weather conditions throughout the region, with high winds and low humidity increasing the danger. "Conditions will be favorable for rapid fire spread which may threaten life and property," the warning reads. "Use extra caution with potential ignition sources, especially in grassy areas. Outdoor burning is not recommended."

But in the long run, a drastic reduction in the burning of fossil fuels is necessary to keep the planet inhabitable. As NASA's Global ***Climate Change*** project writes: "The current warming trend is of particular significance because most of it is extremely likely (greater than 95 percent probability) to be the result of human activity since the mid-20th century and proceeding at a rate that is unprecedented." According to NASA, Earth's atmospheric carbon dioxide never rose above 300 parts per million until 1950; now it is well above 400 parts per million, and, "There is no question that increased levels of greenhouse gases must cause the Earth to warm."

In Our View: Reminder of climate change blows into county

Naysayers insist that climate change is part of the planet's natural cycle. But 97 percent of peer-reviewed climate studies have concluded that human activity has contributed to global warming.

That often has little noticeable impact on our daily lives. But sometimes, when the weather is not fine, we are reminded of the broad effects of climate change.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: **CLIMATE CHANGE** (93%); WILDFIRES (92%); FIRES (91%); WEATHER (91%); ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE (90%); REPORTS, REVIEWS & SECTIONS (90%); SEVERE WIND (90%); CLIMATOLOGY (89%); FOREST FIRES (89%); TROPICAL STORMS (88%); OCEANOGRAPHIC & ATMOSPHERIC SERVICES (78%); TRENDS (78%); WEATHER ALERTS (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL ACCIDENTS & DISASTERS (77%); CITY GOVERNMENT (76%); HURRICANES (76%); NEGATIVE NEWS (76%); SPACE PROGRAMS (67%); PUBLIC LANDS (66%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (59%)

Industry: ENERGY & UTILITIES (78%); POWER FAILURES (77%); PUBLISHING (73%); SPACE PROGRAMS (67%)

Geographic: SPOKANE, WA, USA (79%); WASHINGTON, USA (93%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (95%)

Load-Date: October 12, 2021