

Peggy Notebaert museum exhibit drives home climate change

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Body

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Climate change can be hard for people to understand because humans are adaptable. But other life-forms aren't so lucky.

"We don't have to shiver or pant, we can just **change** the AC," said Steve Sullivan, senior curator of urban ecology for the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum. "Other species can't do that. **Change** from a biological standpoint is impossible for most organisms. If this summer is half a degree warmer, climatologists are going to freak out but homeowners won't notice a difference."

The museum is helping to educate visitors on the causes and effects of **climate change**, and how they can help, through the exhibit "Weather to **Climate**: Our **Changing** World," which runs in Chicago through Oct. 23 before heading out on tour.

"**Climate change** is really the defining issue of our time, and we saw that as an issue that we as an institution could address," Sullivan said. "We also noticed that a lot of museums rent traveling exhibits that address pressing issues, but oddly there are no really good, moderately sized traveling exhibits on **climate change**."

The exhibit opens by explaining the difference between weather and **climate**, letting kids play dress up in front of a mirror to see how their clothes may **change** frequently, like the weather. But **climate** — like a person's wardrobe — is typically consistent over time, depending on where you live. Residents of Hawaii, for example, might wear heavy jackets on occasion, but their overall wardrobe will be lighter than if they lived in Chicago.

"If you look at the political debate, a lot of times we conflate weather and **climate**," Sullivan said. "The weather you are experiencing at this moment is a data point. It's really kind of irrelevant. That collection of data points that are studied over 30 years equals a meaningful **climate** data point. When we look at that overall picture, not just what's happening today or yesterday, is when we can really see what's going on."

Kids can also take on the role of a meteorologist, donning suit jackets, standing in front of a green screen in a mock television studio and reading weather reports off a teleprompter while they see themselves amid graphics.

"At the most superficial level you're just interacting with this goofy, fun thing and seeing pictures of weather," Sullivan said. "At the most sophisticated level the text is informing the audience of how weather and **climate** are **changing** and how this affects people."

The middle section of the exhibit addresses the effects of **climate change** using mounted specimens of red and gray squirrels as an example.

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Kids can also spin a wheel of fortune showing different animals and weather conditions they could be exposed to. A video then explains the potential effects. For instance the pika, a miniature rabbit with short ears, lives in high elevations and wouldn't mind colder temperatures. But pikas — who spend cold months eating stores of hay — would not get enough food to survive the winter if it was too wet.

"These specific plants and animals are adapted to specific climactic regimes," Sullivan said. "As those **climates change**, those animals may be able to adapt, they may be able to move. But most things that have to adapt to **change** in the world simply go extinct."

The exhibit ends by exploring how humans are impacting **climate change**. A sculpture incorporates 94 balls, each filled with a cubic foot of air to represent the amount of carbon dioxide the average American puts out in a day through the burning of fossil fuels.

By following tips for reducing their carbon footprint, visitors can help prevent **climate change** from getting worse.

"We want to end on a note that empowers people and, importantly, we want to end on a positive note that makes them feel like they can make a difference," Sullivan said.

Graphic

Courtesy of Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum "Weather to **Climate**: Our **Changing** World" at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum helps educate visitors on the implications of **climate change**. Courtesy of Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum "Weather to **Climate**: Our **Changing** World" at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum helps educate visitors on the implications of **climate change**. Courtesy of Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum "Weather to **Climate**: Our **Changing** World" at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum helps educate visitors on the implications of **climate change**. Courtesy of Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum "Weather to **Climate**: Our **Changing** World" at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum helps educate visitors on the implications of **climate change**.

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