

## **Editorial: Ho-hum. Climate change is bad and getting worse**

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### **Body**

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On Monday in Berlin, the head of the United Nations scientific panel on climate change said the world's governments will have to "exercise a high level of enlightenment" to find agreement on how to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

Good luck with that. In the United States, we still don't have a high level of enlightenment about whether man-made global warming is a real thing or merely a left-wing plot to disrupt freedom.

Still international scientists and policy-makers who live in a fact-based universe are meeting this week in Germany's capital. The goal, said Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is a "robust, policy-relevant and informative document" aimed at keeping global temperature increases below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F) by the end of the century.

Climate scientists generally believe that a 2-degree Celsius (3.6 F) rise in global temperatures would have catastrophic effects. Last year, for the first time in what is believed to be 800,000 years, the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide, propelled by burning fossil fuels, reached 400 parts per million. The higher it climbs, the worse the effects will be. On Sunday, at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography observatory in Hawaii, it was measured at 402 parts per million.

Last week the IPCC released the second part of a three-part study, done every seven years, analyzing changes in the climate and attempts to deal with it. The key paragraph:

"Throughout the 21st century, climate-change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, make poverty reduction more difficult, further erode food security, and prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hot spots of hunger."

The news was bad enough that the panel suggests that governments learn to live with climate change even as they work to mitigate its worst effects. Floodwalls and cooling centers aren't much of a response, but they're the best we've got.

The report said that natural and human systems are being affected on every continent and in every ocean. For each effect, the scientists ranked their level of confidence in the role that climate change is playing.

There is high confidence that glaciers are shrinking and permafrost is melting. The geographic ranges of marine and land species have changed, along with migration patterns and the abundance of some species.

There are lower crop yields at most latitudes, particularly in regions (such as sub-Saharan Africa) where people are least able to cope with the effects.

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The scientists expressed "very high confidence" that extreme weather events - heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones and wildfires - are more prevalent.

All of these factors interact in ways that will make political problems worse. There will be food riots, water wars and revolutions that are caused, at least in part, by **climate change**.

"These aren't new conclusions. Water and food are likely to become over the years under stress," Todd Stern, the U.S. special envoy on **climate change**, told a meeting of editorial writers in Washington, D.C., on Monday.

He added, "It is just not tolerable in this country at the national congressional leadership level to not have this issue on the table. We can't continue playing these games forever."

It's not just at the congressional level. The World Bank has estimated that it would take about \$100 billion a year to help developing nations mitigate the effects of **climate change**. The U.S. share of that could be \$30 billion a year. The New York Times reports that U.S. officials who took part in drafting the U.N. report, along with those from other wealthy nations, wanted that \$100 billion figure minimized.

Why? Because of its political sensitivity. When the U.N. **Climate** Summit meets in New York in September, developing nations can be expected to point out that they did almost nothing to create the problem, having burned relatively little fossil fuel. But they will feel the worst impacts of **climate change** first. Helping them cope would require industrialized nations essentially to double foreign-aid spending.

If you think there's opposition to **climate change** now, wait until the Third World presents its bill.

It should be recalled that environmental doomsday scenarios are not new. In 1798, the Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus predicted that unchecked population growth would doom the world. Latter-day Malthusians found a voice in Paul Ehrlich's "The Population Bomb" in 1968. Advances in fertility control and agricultural science took some of the pressure off.

Technology may yet bail the Earth out of **climate** disaster, too. It would be foolhardy to count on it, but that's apparently the strategy most of the world has adopted. Reversing the effects of global warming would require at least a 60 percent cut in greenhouse gases, and even then would take decades to work.

Still, in recent years the United States has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions, thanks to a combination of recession, greater use of natural gas and alternative fuels and conservation efforts. But the gains we have made are more than offset by emissions in China, India and other nations. They want the automobiles, air-conditioning and industry that we enjoy. We are not the only people who find it hard to sacrifice our comforts for the benefits of others.

**Climate change**, as the latest U.N. report emphasizes, is real and getting worse. It may have to get much worse before the world recognizes it. It will.

## Notes

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HO-HUM ON **CLIMATE CHANGE**

## Graphic

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Editorial: Ho-hum. Climate change is bad and getting worse

**Climate change** -- it's not just for polar bears any more. Editorial Cartoon by NICK ANDERSON • The Houston Chronicle - Rich Countries to Poor Countries: "It's important that we make plans to adapt to **climate change**, just in case..."

## Classification

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