

The reality of global warming.



By David Leonhardt

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The temperature in Washington has topped 90 degrees for 12 straight days. While I was sitting inside during one of those days trying to avoid the heat, I spent some time making a chart. You can see it above.

It shows the average number of days per year when the temperature cracked 90 degrees in various cities, during the first eight decades of the 20th century (before global warming became more severe), and then in the past 10 years.

I chose 15 major cities from the National Weather Service's database, without knowing exactly what I'd find. In four of the cities, mostly in the Midwest, the numbers are virtually unchanged. But in the other 11, there has been a substantial increase. Houston, for example, used to have 89 days above 90 degrees in a typical year; it now has 115. Atlanta has gone from 36 to 56, and Denver from 27 to 48.

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Jacob Fenston, writing for the Washington radio station WAMU, looks ahead:

"Historically, D.C. experienced a week's worth of days where it felt like 100 degrees. By 2050, there could be almost six weeks (41 days) where the heat index rises to 100 degrees," he writes. "By the end of the century, D.C. could be sweating through a solid two months and one week of days that feel like 100 degrees. This is all if the world takes no serious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Fifty years after the moon landing, Lori Garver, the former deputy NASA administrator, argues that the space agency should refocus its efforts on a more terrestrial threat: a warming world. "Climate change — not Russia, much less China — is today's existential

threat,” she writes in The Washington Post.

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David Leonhardt is a former Washington bureau chief for the Times, and was the founding editor of The Upshot and head of The 2020 Project, on the future of the Times newsroom. He won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, for columns on the financial crisis. [@DLeonhardt](#) • [Facebook](#)

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