

[Global Warming Sends a Severe Message](#)

Global warming and climate change are moving to centerstage. Global warming is a huge issue with intensely intimate consequences at the personal and community level. What we need to recognize is that choices we make in the way we live at the local and community level can make differences.

Most of the choices we make about how we choose to live are economic and political choices. These are choices about forms of consumption (humans have always been consumers). They are political choices in terms of energy production and transportation choice.

Global Warming is only the most recent case of man induced troubles for the earth. Rachel Carson's campaign against DDT caused malaria to re-emerge in Africa, killing hundreds of thousands of human beings.

Greenhouse gases play an important role in climate change but are only a contributing factor. It should not come as a surprise that our entire solar system has been warming up for the last quarter century, or that the most accurate weather forecasts come from algorithms that concentrate on solar fluctuations and cosmic rays. Greenhouse gases are first of all an air pollution problem, and all air pollution problems of the past have cost significantly less to fix than projected, while declining faster than expected.

This gives cause to hope that greenhouse gases can be controlled reasonably cheaply and without wrenching sacrifices to the global economy. However, recent evidence suggests that changes like the melting of glaciers and of polar icecaps are occurring much faster than expected. A positive feedback loop caused by man and naturally occurring cyclical trends may have already been established and climate change will progress on an accelerated course no matter what we now do to arrest it.

Greenhouses use a Co₂ "poison" level of 1000ppm which is great for plant growth. This level of Co₂ has not hurt anyone yet, even those who spend a long period of time in such an environment. But the problem is not in inhaling the gas. It is that Co₂ causes temperature increases. Greenhouse gases are accumulating in Earth's atmosphere as a result of human activities, causing surface air temperatures and subsurface ocean temperatures to rise. Temperatures are in fact rising at a speed that is alarming.

Climate prediction relies on other, longer term factors. For instance, we might not know if it will be below freezing on a specific December day in New England, but we know from our understanding of the region's climate that the temperatures during the month will generally be low. Climate change due to human influence, a phenomenon that many commentators seem unwilling or unable to accept, is the result of unsustainable activities. It is a worldwide problem and that is a big part of the challenge. Effective controlling measures will take a level of cooperation between nations that has never before taken place.

Since the late-19th century, the industrialized world has been using fossil fuels, both coal and petroleum, to produce our comfortable, energy-intensive lifestyle. Over the next 20 to 50 years climate change, whether caused by natural or human factors, or a combination of both, will likely have a serious impact on huge numbers of the earth's population.

Damage to coral reefs caused by global warming is already well underway. Scientists emphasize that most of the damage to coral is inflicted by global warming through coral bleaching, the result of higher water temperatures heating the coral. The warming waters stress the coral, which then expels the microscopic plants or algae that give the coral color and nourishes it. The coral reef then dies. Scientists have shown that cave formations could help settle the contentious debate on whether hurricanes are strengthening in intensity due to global warming.

Measuring oxygen isotope variation in stalagmites in Actun Tunichil Muknal cave in central Belize, a team of researchers have identified evidence of rainfall from 11 tropical cyclones over a 23 year period (1978-2001). Scientists believe CO₂ levels will rise another 30% during the next 50 years and lead to the increasing violence of storms.

Scientists are increasingly worried about emissions from developing countries like China and India. China is expected to pass the United States this year or next to become the world's largest emitter of global warming gases. Scientists have concluded that human activities are contributing to global warming by adding large amounts of heat trapping gases to the atmosphere. Our fossil fuel use is the main source of these gases.

Scientists made their discovery by comparing the SeaWiFS record of the rise and fall of global ocean plant life to different measures of recent global climate change. The climate records included several factors that directly affect ocean conditions, such as changes in sea surface temperature and surface winds. The fact that sea temperatures are currently increasing worldwide are not disputed.

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activities. Since the late-19th century, the industrialized world has been using fossil fuels, both coal and petroleum, to produce our comfortable, energy-intensive lifestyle. It is difficult to break away from the use of fossil fuels as so many of the earth's population depend upon them for energy and economic development.

There are plenty of troubling signs that trouble is on the way. For example, ice sheets break away from the Perito Moreno Glacier in Patagonia, Argentina, where the melting rate of ice fields has doubled in recent years. Glaciers around the world are rapidly retreating, a sure sign, scientists say, of global warming. Ice core records show that whenever CO₂ has increased in the earth's past, so has temperature. The recent increase in atmospheric CO₂ is 200 times as great as any previous change seen in the ice cores.

All the signs point to dramatic changes to occur with the earth's weather over the next few years. In fact, judging from recent drought, hurricane and tornado activity the leading edge of this activity may already be upon us. The speed at which climate change is now occurring is surprising the scientists. It may be that it is already too late to escape disaster and that much of the 21st century will be one of spreading misery.

About the Author

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