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Climate change: It's real and it's dangerous

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

Vast raging forest fires, a gigantic wind and thunderstorm system, and boiling, record-breaking temperatures have helped to further convince millions of us -- including the majority of climatologists -- that the earth's climate is dangerously changing, and human-induced global warming is at the heart of it.

A few weeks ago, a massive "land hurricane" starting in the upper Midwest plowed a deadly, destructive path south and east toward the mid-Atlantic.

And with two long months still to go, this summer has already produced huge, blazing wildfires in Montana, Utah, New Mexico, Wyoming, and especially Colorado, where Gov. John Hickenlooper declared, "This is the worst fire season in the history of Colorado."

A leading climate scientist, Jonathan Overpeck, told The Associated Press that this summer's weather so far is "what global warming looks like. ... The extra heat increases the odds of worse heat waves, droughts, storms and wildfire." (For excellent segments, go to: democracynow.org/special/extreme_weather.)

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, January to June 2012 was the warmest first half of any year on record for the lower 48 states. In June alone, more than 3,000 daily high-temperature records were tied or broken.

Furthermore, climate watchers are very concerned that all 10 of the warmest 12-month periods on record have occurred in the last 15 years.

A new NOAA study concluded that recent extreme weather events are likely connected to human-induced climate change.

Studying 50 years of weather data in Texas, the report said the drought there in 2011 was "roughly 20 times more likely" because of human-made climate change, caused from greenhouse gases produced by the burning of fossil fuels like oil and gas.

Tom Karl, who heads NOAA's climate office, said the extreme weather phenomena not only in Texas but throughout the world cannot be explained by natural variability alone because naturally, "they're just too rare, too uncommon."

NOAA made clear in its study that the climate change it's identified is man-made.

In 2011, a working group of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences issued a sobering report on the reality of climate change.

In their declaration, the working group called "on all people and nations to recognize the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by the anthropogenic [human-made] emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other land uses."

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The report called on nations to "reduce worldwide carbon dioxide emissions without delay, using all means possible to meet ambitious international global warming targets and ensure the long-term stability of the climate system."

Furthermore, the report said poor countries should receive the necessary assistance required to weather the global-warming storm, caused overwhelmingly by industrialized nations.

It is imperative that we quickly convert from energy systems fueled by dangerous coal, oil and nuclear power to clean sustainable energy sources of wind, solar, wave and geothermal, which will dramatically reduce global warming.

Moving toward a comprehensive modern mass-transit system, electric vehicles, increased recycling and the planting of new forests are also essential to reversing catastrophic climate change.

And don't forget to change your light bulbs to energy-saving compact fluorescent bulbs.

In his 2010 World Day of Peace message, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "If we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us."

Let's work to protect planet earth -- the only home we have!

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist.]

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