



GLOBAL WARMING LINKED TO HUMANS, NEW REPORT SAYS

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Using the strongest language yet, the world's top climate scientists released a report last week blaming humans for global warming.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), made up of more than 2,500 scientists from over 130 nations, said it is "very likely" -- or more than 90 percent probable -- that human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels, has caused the Earth's temperature to rise.

"Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global mean sea level," the scientists said in the report.

Projected global changes

Burning fossil fuels such as coal, natural gas and crude oil creates carbon dioxide gas, a "greenhouse gas" that traps heat below the Earth's atmosphere, warming the planet like a plant hothouse.

According to the report, the temperature on the Earth will likely increase about 3.5 degrees to 8 degrees Fahrenheit by 2050 if the concentration of carbon dioxide doubles pre-industrial levels, as expected.

Even moderate increases in global temperatures would likely greatly impact ecosystems, water supplies and agricultural production.

Northern areas will see more precipitation while semi-arid, subtropical regions will see even more drought and less rain, the New York Times reported.

With this climate change will come increasingly extreme weather events, such as heat waves, droughts and floods, the report predicted.

According to the report, sea levels are expected to rise between 7 inches and 23 inches in the 21st century -- and could be higher if ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland melt.

Impact on humans

More water could immerse low-lying islands, and flood the coastal zones of countries like Bangladesh and cities such as Shanghai, China, and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

And changing weather patterns could cause droughts and floods in Africa and Asia.

"If you're living in parts of tropics and they're getting drier and you're a farmer there are some acute issues associated with even small changes in rainfall -- changes we're already seeing are significant," Susan Solomon, the co-leader of the team that wrote the report's summary and an atmospheric scientist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, told the New York Times.

"If you're an Inuit and you're seeing your sea ice retreating already that's affecting your lifestyle and culture."

And those impacted most greatly will be the poorest of the poor.

"But it is the poor, in Africa and developing small island states and elsewhere, who will suffer the most, even though they are the least responsible for global warming," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told world environmental ministers meeting in Kenya Monday.

The U.N. leader has been charged with finding a replacement for the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty aimed at cutting greenhouse gases, which expires in 2012.

Reducing emissions

Scientists believe that global warming will increase even if humans reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions. But reducing emissions is essential to minimizing the impact.

"If we don't bring the emissions under control, we can expect potentially very, very much greater changes than what we have already seen. So to use maybe an unfortunate metaphor, this is just the tip of the iceberg compared to what may be in store for us in the future," Michael Oppenheimer, a member of the U.N. climate change panel and a contributor to the report, told the NewsHour.

This initial report is expected to be followed by three others, including one that will provide recommendations on how to mitigate the impact of the expected climate change.

-- Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra

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