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Temps headed for highest in millennia

March 7, 2013 7:39 pm / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

CORVALLIS, Ore., March 7 (UPI) -- U.S. climate researchers say average global temperatures have been higher in the last decade than at any time during most of the previous 11,300 years.

In a study published by the Journal Science, researchers from Oregon State University and Harvard University, write about the Holocene era, a relatively balmy period that began after the last major ice age ended and encompasses all of recorded human history.

The researchers say the decade 2000-2009 was one of the warmest since modern record-keeping began, and they forecast the planet will be warmer in 2100 than it has been at any time in those 11,300 years, The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday.

A 1-degree temperature variation that took most of those 11 millennia to occur has been replicated in just 150 years, beginning with the early days of the Industrial Revolution, the researchers said.

The suddenness of the shift in temperature is at odds with the long-term trend, strongly suggesting the change is attributable to human activity, they said.

"What's different is the rate of change," Oregon State paleoclimatologist Shaun Marcott said. "What we've seen over the past 150 years is much greater than anything we saw in the past 11,000 years." Copyright 2012 United Press International, Inc. (UPI). Any reproduction, republication, redistribution and/or modification of any UPI content is expressly prohibited without UPI's prior written consent.

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5.6-magnitude earthquake shakes Taiwan

March 7, 2013 8:48 am / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

XIULIN, Taiwan, March 7 (UPI) -- A 5.7-magnitude earthquake shook Hualien County, Taiwan, Thursday, the China Earthquake Networks Center said.

The epicenter of the quake was located in Xiulin Township at a depth of about 19,700 feet, the Chinese earthquake center said.

A local meteorological authority in Taiwan said the epicenter was located at a depth closer to 49,900 feet.

Residents in Taipei reported feeling a strong tremor, the official Chinese Xinhua news agency reported. No injuries or deaths were reported.

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Norway: Nuclear blast effects dire

March 7, 2013 12:06 am / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

OSLO, Norway, March 7 (UPI) -- The humanitarian disaster from a nuclear weapon blast would overcome the ability of any state or international group to cope with, Norway's top diplomat says.

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Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide, who led an international conference on the humanitarian impact on nuclear weapons in Oslo this week, made that assessment as part of his official report on conclusions reached at the event.

Delegations representing 127 countries, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and civil society participated in the conference, which assessed the global humanitarian consequences of nuclear detonations.

"It is the chair's view that this broad participation reflects the increasing global concern regarding the effects of nuclear weapons detonations, as well as the recognition that this is an issue of fundamental significance to us all," Eide said in a statement.

Humanitarian groups at the conference said they it would provide a starting point to reopen discussions about banning nuclear weapons worldwide.

Not present, however, were the five nuclear-armed members of the U.N. Security Council -- the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia -- which stayed away from the event.

Eide said the one of the key points agreed on by the participants was that the scale of the devastation from a nuclear blast would be so profound it would swamp the abilities of states or international humanitarian groups to provide effective aid.

"It is unlikely that any state or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in an adequate manner and provide sufficient assistance to those affected," he said. "Moreover, it might not be possible to establish such capacities, even if it were attempted."

The Norwegian diplomat also said attendees agreed on two other main conclusions.

First, despite the end of Cold War and a changed political landscape in which countries are no longer directly threatening each other with nuclear destruction, the "destructive potential of nuclear weapons remains."

Also, that the effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, "irrespective of cause, will not be constrained by national borders, and will affect states and people in significant ways, regionally as well as globally."

Eide told Norway's NTB news agency he was pleased with the outcome of the event, despite the absence of the Security Council members.

"We have managed without them because it is not only countries with nuclear weapons that can discuss this," he said, noting that Mexico has agreed to host a follow-up conference.

"This conference has shown that any use of nuclear armaments would cause mass suffering, with calculations of climate disruption and famine in non-nuclear as well as nuclear-armed countries," Rebecca Johnson, co-chairwoman of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, said in a statement.

"This global impact makes it the responsibility -- and right -- of everyone to take action to stop this from happening."

Meanwhile, a member of Scotland's Parliament blasted Britain's decision to not attend.

Bill Kidd of the Scottish National Party asserted it was "utterly disgraceful" for Britain to boycott the gathering, adding that "as a nuclear weapons state, they're embarrassed to face up to the rest of the world."

The SNP, which is seeking independence from Britain, has promised to remove nuclear-armed Trident submarines from Scotland.

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Climate clues hidden under Antarctic ice

March 6, 2013 6:52 pm / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

TUCSON, March 6 (UPI) -- The shape of Antarctica, beneath miles of ice, could yield clues to how the continent's ice sheet affects global climate and sea-level rise, scientists say.

University of Arizona researchers have been studying what caused the topography to start shifting from a flat landscape to one with glaciers, fjords and mountains 34 million years ago.

Radar surveys have revealed a rugged alpine landscape under Antarctica's 2-mile-thick ice sheet, but just when those deep valleys formed has been a question, they said.

"People have speculated when the big fjords formed under the ice," researcher Stuart N. Thomson said. "But no one knows for sure until you sample the rocks or the sediments."

Since the landscape of Antarctica is inaccessible below its thick covering of ice, Thomson and his colleagues had to analyze Antarctica's rocks by examining the sediments that built up off-shore for millions of years as rocks and dirt eroded off the continent.

"We use the sediments to trace what was happening under the ice in the past," Thomson said.

Between 250 and 34 million years ago, the researchers said, erosion was slow, suggesting Antarctica was relatively flat and drained by slow-moving rivers.

About 34 million years ago, as climate shift began to cover the continent in ice, the rate of erosion more than doubled, Thomson said.

"The only way that could happen is from glaciers," he said. "They started grinding and forming deep valleys."

Knowing how the ice sheets changed in the past is important for predicting future changes in ice sheet growth, sea-level change and climate, Thomson said.

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Climate change threatens lizards

March 6, 2013 3:26 pm / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

LINCOLN, England, March 6 (UPI) -- Global warming could lead to extinction within 50 years of lizard species whose embryos are retained with their mothers' bodies, British researchers say.

Dozens of lizard species characterized by viviparous reproduction, as opposed to egg-laying species, are threatened, scientists at the Universities of Lincoln and Exeter said.

"Lizards' reproduction is largely linked to climatic temperatures and viviparous species are usually found in cold environments," Lincoln researcher Daniel Pincheira-Donoso said in a Lincoln University release Wednesday.

"When reptiles initially moved to colder areas they needed to evolve emergency measures to succeed in these harsh places, and we believe viviparity is one of these key measures, he said. "However, this transition is mostly one-directional and unlikely to be reversed. Rapid changes in the environment's temperature would demand rapid re-adaptations to secure the species' survival."

Viviparity allowed lizards in the past to invade and adapt to live in cold environments, and was a key trait for their evolutionary success, but now it could be a factor in multiple events of extinction, the researchers said.

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Study: Superstorm Sandy not a freak event

March 6, 2013 3:07 pm / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

ITHACA, N.Y., March 6 (UPI) -- October's "Superstorm" Sandy was not a freak occurrence but a predictable consequence of loss of arctic sea ice because of global warming, U.S. researchers say.

Scientists at Cornell University and Rutgers University said the severe loss of summertime arctic sea ice has increased the frequency of atmospheric blocking events like the one that steered Hurricane Sandy west into the densely populated New York City area.

The decrease in sea ice appears to enhance Northern Hemisphere jet stream meandering and intensify arctic air mass invasions toward middle latitudes, leading to the increase in blocking, they said.

Such a strong atmospheric, high-pressure blocking pattern over Greenland and the northwest Atlantic Ocean prevented Sandy from steering northeastward and out to sea like most October hurricanes and tropical storms from the Caribbean, the researchers said.

Instead, Sandy traveled up the Atlantic Coast and turned left "toward the most populated area along the Eastern Seaboard" and converged with an extratropical cyclone that transformed it into a monster tempest, the scientists said.

"If one accepts this evidence and ... takes into account the record loss of arctic sea ice this past September, then perhaps the likelihood of greenhouse warming playing a significant role in Sandy's evolution as an extratropical superstorm is at least as plausible as the idea that this storm was simply a freak of nature," the researchers wrote in the journal *Oceanography*.

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Millions of locusts invade Israel

March 6, 2013 5:39 am / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

JERUSALEM, March 6 (UPI) -- Israeli Agricultural Ministry personnel resumed spraying millions of locusts with pesticides in southern Israel Wednesday, officials said.

A large swarm of locusts darkened the skies over southern Israel Tuesday afternoon as the insects landed in fields across the Negev, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars damage, Israel Radio reported.

After nightfall, the Ministry of Agriculture sprayed about 4 square miles where the locusts settled for the night. Officials said they would resume spraying the area Wednesday.

The swarms of locusts were described as the largest infestation in decades, *The Times of Israel* said. Residents were instructed to remain indoors and close windows and shutters.

The locusts aren't expected to reach central Israel's populated areas due to a cold front that should force the insects south, *The Times of Israel* said. However Israel Radio said preparations should be made in the event the locusts head north.

Additional swarms of locusts crossed into Egypt from Sudan Tuesday heading toward Aswan, al-Masry al-Youm said.

In the Gaza Strip, farmers were instructed to close hothouses and residents told to shut windows and doors of their homes.

The Israeli Agricultural Ministry issued a locust alert Tuesday after the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization reported large swarms of locusts in Egypt.

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Netherlands shares flood control expertise

March 6, 2013 12:04 am / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

WASHINGTON, March 6 (UPI) -- The Netherlands says its experience and innovation in water management can help the United States and the rest of world better deal with flooding disasters.

Dutch Minister for Infrastructure and the Environment Melanie Schultz van Haegen, on a visit to New York, Washington and the United Nations this week, told U.S. officials coping with the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy the Netherlands can help with the development of plans to mitigate increasingly frequent flooding disasters.

"Although different in scale, the landscapes of the Netherlands and New York have much in common," she said. "Both are river deltas with rivers, estuaries and basins. The Netherlands has a long history of water management.

"However, I don't just want to provide expertise, I also want to learn about the American approach," she added.

The Netherlands in 2015 is set to complete a \$3 billion flood control program called Room for the River, in which rather than continually heightening its vast system of dikes along rivers to guard against more frequent and higher surges triggered by climate change, 39 spots have been designated to allow the waterways to expand naturally.

Those areas feature excavated flood plains, deepened river beds, new storage lakes, relocated dikes, high-water channels and other advanced water management techniques.

The government's aim with the effort is to enhance the "sustainability" and "livability" of the areas around the rivers -- breaking a centuries-old cycle of heightening dikes followed by even greater levels of damage when they are eventually breached.

Schultz van Haegen met Monday in Washington with U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, who is chairman of U.S. President Barack Obama's Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force. Schultz van Haegen and Donovan they signed a memorandum of understanding laying out agreements on sharing knowledge and experiences in the field of water safety.

"Our two nations have much to learn from each other about finding innovative solutions to age-old shared problems," Donovan said. "The Dutch are no strangers to the forces of nature and I'm certain we can benefit from their experience in disaster mitigation, infrastructure management and a variety of approaches to sustainable community development and planning."

Under the U.S.-Netherlands memorandum, the countries would work on new community development strategies that place a premium on sustainability and livability principles, as well as explore the Dutch "building with nature" approach.

The two nations also promised to work together to "leverage private and philanthropic investments to maximize public investments in urban development and long-term disaster mitigation."

Also on Schultz van Haegen's agenda was a visit to New York and Hoboken, N.J., where Hurricane Sandy caused an estimate \$50 billion in damage.

There, Dutch water management companies such as Royal HaskoningDHV, Fugro, Arcadis, Deltares, Dutch Water Design, Tygron and Palmbout Urban Landscapes were to share their expertise with U.S. counterparts.

She was also this week to attend the United Nations' Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters, where attendees are to gather to "raise awareness, share experiences and good practices and discuss ways forward towards global actions on water and disasters."

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Warming to open arctic shipping routes

March 5, 2013 5:23 pm / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

LOS ANGELES, March 5 (UPI) -- An unprecedented amount of sea ice melting during the late summer with global warming will open unexpected new shipping routes in the arctic, researchers say.

The frigid northerly routes will be much more accessible than ever expected, UCLA researchers reported.

"The development is both exciting from an economic development point of view and worrisome in terms of safety, both for the arctic environment and for the ships themselves," lead researcher and geography Professor Laurence C. Smith said.

By mid-century shipping vessels will be able to navigate previously inaccessible parts of the Arctic Ocean and will not need icebreakers to clear they way as they do today, the researchers said.

"We're talking about a future in which open-water vessels will, at least during some years, be able to navigate unescorted through the Arctic, which at the moment is inconceivable," co-author Scott R. Stephenson, a geography doctoral candidate, said.

With global warming, the ice sheets may become so thin polar icebreakers will be able to navigate between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans by making a straight path over the North Pole, the researchers said.

"Nobody's ever talked about shipping over the top of the North Pole," Smith said. "This is an entirely unexpected possibility."

However, they said, even with global warming arctic access will not last beyond late summer.

"This will never be a year-round operation," Smith emphasized.

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Australia experiences 'angry summer'

March 5, 2013 3:16 pm / [Leave a Comment](#) / [UPI.com](#)

SYDNEY, March 5 (UPI) -- In what it calls the "Angry Summer," a new report from Australia's Climate Commission links the country's extreme weather events to climate change.

At least 123 weather records were broken during Australia's 2013 summer -- the hottest ever -- through Feb. 28.

Extreme heat waves and catastrophic bushfire conditions during the "Angry Summer" were made worse by climate change, the report says, adding that "it is virtually certain that extreme hot weather will continue to become even more frequent and severe around the globe, including Australia, over the coming decades."

The commission, comprised of an independent panel of experts that isn't subject to government direction or oversight but issues reports on behalf of the government, called for an increase in renewable energy to combat greenhouse gas emissions.

"In Australia and around the world we need to urgently invest in clean energy sources and take other measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. This is the critical decade to get on with the job," the report states.

Australia relies on coal power for around 80 percent of its electricity generation.

Climate Commission Chief Tim Flannery likened the climate shift to an athlete on steroids.

"I think one of the best ways of thinking about it is imagining that the base line has shifted," Flannery told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. "If an athlete takes steroids, for example, their base line shifts. They'll do fewer slow times and many more record-breaking fast times."

"The same thing is happening with our climate system," he said. "As it warms up, we're getting fewer cold days and cold events and many more record hot events."

Flannery cited the summer's record dry spells, heat waves and floods as a pattern that would continue in coming decades.

While Australia typically experiences naturally occurring cycles of drought and flooding, the country was inundated with a stream of erratic weather even before the summer of 2012-13. In 2011, Queensland was hit by flooding and cyclones and last year a decade-long drought that had affected the country's farms was declared over. Firestorms in 2009 claimed hundreds of lives.

Flannery told ABC that "what we're seeing is a whole slew of new records ... new climatic territory" in Australia as well as in the United States and in the arctic.

"The report shows how all of that relates to a change in climate due to the increased burden of greenhouse gases," Flannery said.

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