

Drought, fires affect global CO₂ levels

August 5 2005

Some scientists are warning this summer's drought across Europe will release large amounts of carbon dioxide, giving further impetus to global warming.

Estimates from CarboEurope, a European Union research team based in Jena, Germany, suggest that during July and August 2003, about 500 million tons of carbon escaped from Western Europe's forests and fields as crops shriveled, soils desiccated and trees burnt.

But now the organization says Western Europe -- including Spain, Portugal, Italy, France and parts of the United Kingdom -- is suffering drought on a similar scale to 2003.

The group notes drought is also sweeping across much of the Midwestern United States, with corn crops failing and cattle dying from heat stress.

CarboEurope says U.S. researchers report that since the early 1990s, hot dry summers across the Northern Hemisphere have reduced the ability of plants to absorb CO₂ during their normal growing season.

Alon Angert and colleagues at the University of California-Berkeley say that finding dashes the widespread expectation of a "greening trend," during which warm summer temperatures would speed plant growth and moderate climate change by absorbing some of the industrial CO₂ emissions.

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