

Climate monitor to sample African dust

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U.S. researchers say they plan to place a newly developed portable atmospheric laboratory in Niger to sample African dust.

Scientists in the U.S. Department of Energy's Atmospheric Radiation Measurement Program say the laboratory is designed to gain a better understanding of the potential impacts of Saharan dust on global climate.

Dust from Africa's Sahara desert -- the largest source of dust on Earth -- reaches halfway around the globe. Carried by winds and clouds, the dust travels across West Africa, the Mediterranean, Europe and then across the Atlantic into North America.

"As a point of origin for atmospheric disturbances that evolve into Atlantic storms, the Sahara is not only a driving force for the environmental conditions in Western Africa, but also for the development of weather systems that can reach the United States," said Raymond Orbach, director of the DOE's Office of Science.

Measurements obtained by the project will allow scientists to study possible reasons for the ongoing drought in West Africa and the genesis of tropical waves that evolve into hurricanes.

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