

Skeptic's small cloud study renews climate rancor

July 30 2011, By SETH BORENSTEIN , AP Science Writer

(AP) -- A study on how much heat in Earth's atmosphere is caused by cloud cover has heated up the climate change blogosphere even as it is dismissed by many scientists.

Several mainstream climate scientists call the study's conclusions off-base and overstated. Climate change skeptics, most of whom are not scientists, are touting the study, saying it blasts gaping holes in [global warming](#) theory and shows that future warming will be less than feared. The study in the journal Remote Sensing questions the accuracy of climate computer models and got attention when a lawyer for the conservative Heartland Institute wrote an opinion piece on it.

The author of the scientific study is Roy Spencer of the University of Alabama Huntsville, a prominent climate skeptic. But even he says some bloggers are overstating what the research found. Spencer's study is based on satellite data from 2000 to 2010 and is one of a handful of studies he's done that are part of an ongoing debate among a few scientists.

His research looked at cause and effect of clouds and warming. Contrary to the analysis of a majority of studies, his found that for the past decade, variations in clouds seemed more a cause of warming than an effect. More than anything, he said, his study found that mainstream research and models don't match the 10 years of data he examined. Spencer's study concludes the question of clouds' role in heating "remains an unsolved problem."

Spencer, who uses what he calls a simple model without looking at ocean heat or El Nino effects, finds fault with the more complicated models often run by mainstream climate scientists.

At least 10 [climate scientists](#) reached by The Associated Press found technical or theoretical faults with Spencer's study or its conclusions. They criticized the short time period he studied and his failure to consider the effects of the ocean and other factors. They also note that the paper appears in a journal that mostly deals with the nuts-and-bolts of [satellite data](#) and not interpreting the [climate](#).

"This is a very bad paper and is demonstrably wrong," said Richard Somerville, a scientist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego. "It is getting a lot of attention only because of noise in the blogosphere."

Kerry Emanuel of MIT, one of two scientists who said the study was good, said bloggers and others are misstating what Spencer found. Emanuel said this work was cautious and limited mostly to pointing out problems with forecasting heat feedback. He said what's being written about Spencer's study by nonscientists "has no basis in reality."

©2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Skeptic's small cloud study renews climate rancor (2011, July 30) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-07-skeptic-small-cloud-renews-climate.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--