

2011 a record-breaking year for extreme weather: US

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A man walks down a New York street as Hurricane Irene hits the city, in August 2011. Last year broke records for extreme weather in the United States, with 14 events each causing at least a billion dollars in damage, US authorities said on Thursday.

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Also, 2011 marked 35 years in a row that [global temperatures](#) have been warmer than average, according to data released by the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#).

The NOAA report added two events to the previous toll of 12 disasters last year that cost a billion dollars or more -- Tropical Storm Lee which

assailed the Gulf Coast in September and a spate of tornadoes, hail and high wind that hit the Midwest in July.

"Together, these two events resulted in the loss of 23 lives," it said -- 21 from Tropical Storm Lee and two from the Rockies/Midwest outbreak.

Separately, the [US space agency](#) NASA announced that 2011 was the ninth warmest year on record since 1880 in global average surface temperature, with nine of the 10 warmest years in history taking place since 2000.

Despite the ocean-cooling influence of the [weather phenomenon](#) known as La Nina in the Pacific, the average global temperature last year was 0.92 degrees F (0.51 C) warmer than the mid-20th century baseline.

"We know the planet is absorbing more energy than it is emitting," said NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies director James Hansen.

"So we are continuing to see a trend toward higher temperatures. Even with the cooling effects of a strong La Nina influence and low solar activity for the past several years, 2011 was one of the 10 warmest years on record."

Hansen said that with the anticipated return of El Nino and a coming increase in solar activity, temperatures are likely to peak further in the coming years.

"It's always dangerous to make predictions about El Nino, but it's safe to say we'll see one in the next three years," Hansen said. "It won't take a very strong [El Nino](#) to push temperatures above 2010," which tied with 2005 as the [warmest year](#) on record.

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