Climate change could increase thunderstorm severity

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This spring may be more like a lion than a lamb.

John Harrington Jr. is a synoptic climatologist and professor of geography at Kansas State University who studies weather events, how often they occur and the conditions when they occurred. He says climate change may be increasing the severity of storms.

"One of the big concerns I have is that the warmer atmospheric temperatures will drive a little bit more evaporation out of the ocean and the Gulf of Mexico," Harrington said. "One of the things that helps storms be stronger is having more moisture, so that added moisture may increase the height and severity of a tall cumulonimbus thunderstorm cloud."

Harrington said the added moisture might make storms stronger and more potent in the future.

This year may also bring a change in weather conditions due to El Niño, which the United States hasn't experienced for about two years. El Niño warms the temperature of the Pacific Ocean, which creates cooler and wetter conditions for the West Coast. Harrington says there is a good possibility El Niño will arrive this fall going into winter.

Provided by Kansas State University