

UN says 2013 extreme events due to warming Earth (Update)

March 24 2014, by John Heilprin



In this March 19, 2013, file photo, a trickle of water left in the Rio Grande is pushed downstream by the wind near the Chile growing community of Hatch, N.M. In southern New Mexico, the mighty Rio Grande has gone dry, and farmers are worried about dwindling water supplies as the state enters its third straight year of drought. Top climate scientists are gathering in Japan this week to finish up a report on the impact of global warming. And they say if you think climate change is only faced by some far-off polar bear decades from now, well, you're mistaken. They say the dangers of a warming Earth are immediate and human. While it doesn't say these events were caused by climate change, the report mentions droughts in northern Mexico and south-central United States, as showing how vulnerable people are to these weather extremes. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan, File)

The head of the U.N. weather agency said Monday that recent extreme weather patterns are "consistent" with human-induced climate change, citing key events that wreaked havoc in Asia, Europe, the U.S. and Pacific region last year.

Michel Jarraud, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, said his agency's annual assessment of the global climate shows how dramatically people and lands everywhere felt the impacts of extreme weather such as droughts, heat waves, floods and tropical cyclones.

"Many of the extreme events of 2013 were consistent with what we would expect as a result of human-induced climate change," he said.

The U.N. agency called 2013 the sixth-warmest year on record. Thirteen of the 14 warmest years have occurred in the 21st century.

A rise in sea levels is leading to increasing damage from storm surges and coastal flooding, as demonstrated by Typhoon Haiyan, Jarraud said. The typhoon in November killed at least 6,100 people and caused \$13 billion in damage to the Philippines and Vietnam.

Australia, meanwhile, had its hottest year on record and parts of central Asia and central Africa also notched record highs.

Jarraud drew special attention to studies and climate modeling examining Australia's recent heat waves, saying the high temperatures there would have been virtually impossible without the emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

He cited other costly weather disasters such as \$22 billion damage from central European flooding in June, \$10 billion in damage from Typhoon Fitow in China and Japan, and a \$10 billion drought in much of China.

Only a few places were cooler than normal. Among them was the central U.S.

Jarraud also cited frigid polar air in parts of Europe and the southeast U.S., and the widest tornado ever observed over rural areas of central Oklahoma, as being among extreme weather events.

There were 41 billion-dollar weather disasters in the world last year, the second highest number behind only 2010, according to insurance firm Aon Benfield, which tracks global disasters.

Jarraud spoke as top climate scientists and representatives from about 100 governments with the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change met in Japan to complete their latest report on global warming's impact.

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