

# Cold comfort: US weather in 2014 not too hot, disastrous

8 January 2015, by Seth Borenstein

On a day when much of the U.S. struggled with bone-chilling cold, federal meteorologists said America's weather in 2014 wasn't really that bad.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Thursday that the U.S. average temperature in 2014 was half a degree warmer than normal and weather was less disastrous and drought-struck than previous years. While 2014 was warmer than 2013 in the lower 48 states, it was still only the 34th warmest on record.

That contrasts with the experience of the world as a whole. Globally, it will likely go down as the warmest year on record.

Japan's meteorological agency has already calculated 2014 as the warmest year worldwide. NOAA and NASA will announce global 2014 figures next week, but data through November point toward a new record. The U.S. is only 2 percent of the world's surface; eastern North America was about the only exception to the hot global rule last year and even that chill was outweighed nationally by record western heat, said NOAA climate scientist Jake Crouch.

It was the 18th straight year the U.S. was warmer than the 20th-century average.

"This fits within the context of a long-term warming trend both here and around the globe," Crouch said.

California, Nevada and Arizona had the hottest year in 120 years of record-keeping, while Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah and New Mexico had one of their five warmest years on record.

Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Wisconsin and Michigan had one of their 10 coldest years on record.

"It was a strange year for the U.S.," said University

of Illinois climate scientist Donald Wuebbles. "The extreme warmth and droughts in the western U.S. and the extreme cold winter and cooler summer in the East and Midwest were largely driven by blocking patterns at high latitudes in the Arctic."

Wuebbles said those blocking patterns meant warmer Alaskan temperatures and cold invasions south—like last January's (and probably this week's) deep chill.

For the first time in 101 years of record-keeping, Anchorage, Alaska, never got below zero in 2014, Crouch said.

Last year there were eight weather disasters that caused more than \$1 billion in damage, according to NOAA. The last five years that averaged 10 such billion-dollar disasters.

Munich Re, an international insurance giant, calculated that natural disasters—including earthquakes—caused \$15.3 billion in U.S. insured losses in 2014, down from the average of \$29 billion from 2000 to 2013.

The area of the U.S. struck by drought shrank 2 percent from 2013, yet California's historic drought continues, NOAA said.

**More information:** NOAA's summary of 2014 U.S. weather: [www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/summary-info](http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/summary-info)

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