

Seeing the light and feeling the heat

Written by Ozaukee Press

Wednesday, 29 August 2012 16:01

Not even the doubters and deniers can ignore the evidence that human-produced greenhouse gases are the cause of global weather chaos

Have you heard the news about global warming?

It's going on now. It's getting worse. It's on course to become a disaster of biblical proportions. It's caused by man-made carbon dioxide.

To many people, of course, this is not news at all. A worldwide consensus of scientists has long warned of the catastrophic consequences of climate warming caused by carbon emissions.

But it is news, apparently quite startling news, to the disbelievers and deniers who are just now seeing the light of global warming and feeling its heat.

Earlier this summer, Richard A. Muller, physics professor at the University of California, a high-profile climate-change skeptic whose views were frequently cited by global-warming doubters, announced his conversion, writing that he had "concluded that global warming was real and that prior estimates of the rate of warming were correct." And then he added a finding that has shaken the ranks of deniers: "Humans are almost entirely the cause."

Other public conversions followed the publication of a scientific paper this month by James E. Hansen, a much respected NASA scientist, that said there is no doubt that the drastic increase in the amount of the earth's surface subjected to extreme heat in recent years and the resulting devastating droughts were caused by greenhouse gases released by humans.

Then cracks appeared in one of the most stubborn bastions of global-warming denial, the Wall Street Journal, when it published an op-ed essay by Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund, urging political conservatives to face the reality of man-made climate change and come up with their own remedies instead of criticizing efforts to limit carbon emissions.

There was nothing particularly remarkable about the writer's sensible comments, except that they appeared in a newspaper whose editorial page has treated global warming as a hoax cooked up by environmentalists to cripple capitalism with carbon emission controls.

The apparent dawning of climate-change reason is cause for relief, but not optimism. The folly of doubting for years the preponderance of scientific evidence may be ending, but the time lost by the highjacking of an environmental threat by politics has set back hope for a timely response.

Seeing the light and feeling the heat

Written by Ozaukee Press

Wednesday, 29 August 2012 16:01

A climate simulation model produced by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology indicates there is a 10% chance the earth's average surface temperature will rise by more than 12 degrees by 2100, warming so extreme that much of the life on earth would not survive it.

Short of that catastrophe, frequent crippling droughts and heat waves are almost certain to plague the planet through the century. A report by the National Climatic Data Center predicted that the excess of heat and shortage of rain that broke records this summer—the last 12 months were the hottest one-year period ever in the United States—was a pattern that will assert control over the climate for the coming decades.

Ozaukee County experienced enough of that this summer to see that global warming's consequences go far beyond melting glaciers and threatened polar bears. Plant life suffered greatly as rain avoided the area for weeks at a time. Human life, even people who welcome summer heat as the antidote to frigid winters and chilly springs, suffered through successive days heated to the high 90s or low 100s, the fortunate among them finding relief only in spaces cooled by air conditioning chugging away and adding more carbon to the atmosphere.

The drought here is in remission, but scars remain. Some of them are evident in Lake Michigan, so depleted by the lack the rain and the excess of heat-induced evaporation that its water level is nearly a foot lower than a year ago.

That fits with the global warming scenarios projected by American scientists: higher water levels (dangerous flooding) along the ocean coasts due to the melting of the polar ice caps, lower water (an essential resource depleted) in the Great lakes due to drought.

Thus does the evidence relentlessly build. It should be impossible to ignore, even by those who haven't heard the news about global warming.