



Environmental Updates

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Earthfiles, news category.

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Global Warming:

International computer projections for the next 100 years all agree that the world's average temperature will rise. How high depends upon greenhouse gas build up, but the range will be between 2.5 and 10.5 degrees Fahrenheit. To put that into perspective, if we go back to the last time the earth was 10 degrees cooler than it is now, we have to go back at least ten thousand years to the end of the last Ice Age. So, it took 10,000 years for the earth to warm up 10 degrees F. since ice last covered North America, but may take only the next 100 years to heat up another 10 degrees.

This past week in Geneva, Switzerland, the United Nations-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a serious warning. Many top world environmental scientists who have been studying the consequences of warming temperatures, rising sea levels and shifting weather patterns now predict the following: More frequent and violent storms in Latin America that will keep flooding low-lying areas.

- Declining rainfall and more drought in southern Europe will hurt farmers and food production.
- Deserts will spread in Asia while coastal monsoons will be stronger and cause more flooding.
- Drought will also cause deserts to spread in Africa. As rainfall lessens, food production will become even harder and electric power from dams could be threatened.

European scientists are appealing to the U. S. government to join the international Kyoto Protocol effort to reduce industrial greenhouse emissions, a reduction that so far neither the Clinton nor Bush Administrations have agreed

to.

Over-fishing Oceans:

Also this past week at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in San Francisco, Canadian marine biologist Daniel Pauly warned that commercial fisheries are depleting the world's oceans both down and up the food chain too rapidly from crabs and shrimp to sturgeon and halibut. Dr. Pauly said the oceans are being treated like a strip mining operation in which everything is taken out with no planning or effort to replenish it. "Through this policy, you render rebuilding depleted marine life impossible. If we lose the invertebrates, what's next? If it's OK to move down the food web, what's the ultimate limit plankton? Is that what we want?" Extinctions are threatening many species, including the Beluga sturgeon and orange roughy fish which could be gone in ten years.

Mt. Fuji, Japan Rumbling:

There is an old Japanese proverb: "Natural calamities strike about the time when one forgets their terror." That proverb certainly seems relevant today as Japanese volcano scientists finally have publicly confirmed that Mt. Fuji near Tokyo could erupt any day. Monitors have shown tremors around the mountain for months, but government officials withheld the facts because they did not want to scare away the 2 1/2 million tourists who visit Fuji each year. The last time Mt. Fuji erupted was in 1707 and all of Tokyo was covered with ash. Today the city is home to 11 million people who would all be affected if the volcano erupts with the same force it did 300 years ago.

Another Different CJD?

And finally, in troubled earth news the top headline on the front page of today's Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper says: "Routine symptoms, then a fatal medical mystery. Doctors tested for viruses, bacteria and even the human form of mad cow disease." The Philadelphia victim, Carrie Mahan, was only 29 years old when she died a year ago in February 2000. She went from being a healthy student working two jobs to nausea, fatigue, hallucinations, muscle tremors, coma and death within six weeks.

When doctors examined her brain tissue, they found it full of holes like those found in spongiform encephalopathy diseases such as classic Creutzfeldt-Jakob (known since 1920 in Germany) and the new 1996 variant-CJD associated with mad cow disease in Europe. But what makes this story really spooky and bothers all the doctors and specialists who have tried to get to the bottom of what caused all those brain holes is this. The young woman's brain tissue was sent to several laboratories including the U. S. national center at Case Western Reserve University which screens tissue samples for the misshapen proteins called prions that cause mad cow disease and both forms of known CJD disease. All the analyses were negative, even for the older form of CJD. That means something else, maybe some other protein shape never seen before and not recognized in any lab tests, is still lurking out there.

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