



Weather disasters increasing from climate change, says UN

Fast mitigation is best adaptation

Washington, DC, November 18, 2011 – A definitive UN science [report](#) released today confirms the link between climate change and extreme weather events, including punishing heat waves, droughts, and torrential rains and resulting floods.

The report warns that the U.S. will suffer heat waves, droughts, and more powerful hurricanes like Irene, with vulnerable people and places likely to suffer most from extreme weather, including low-lying island States facing sea level rise and stronger storm surges, and drought-prone countries in Africa.

New York released its own [climate study](#) this week, predicting that with expected sea level rise and stronger storms, future hurricanes could flood the tunnels into Manhattan within an hour and put one-third of the city underwater, with climate induced impacts beginning within a decade. The cost of US weather disasters in 2011 is already approaching \$50 billion, according to the National Climate Data Center.

It is now certain that human emissions of greenhouse gases and warming aerosols like black carbon are increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather by putting more heat energy into the climate system.

“These climate change impacts have become so clear and so close now that we need fast, aggressive mitigation if we hope to avoid the worst consequences,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development.

“Fast mitigation is the best adaptation,” Zaelke added. “Fast mitigation means cutting short-lived climate forcers, including black carbon, ground-level ozone, and hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, used in refrigeration. Cutting these non-CO₂ climate forcers can be done quickly and inexpensively using existing technologies and in most cases existing laws and institutions.” This can cut the rate of global warming in half for several decades and the rate of warming in the Arctic by two-thirds, according to a [report](#) by the UN Environment Program and the World Meteorological Organization.

Vulnerable island States, along with the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, are calling on the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty to reduce HFCs. The parties will be discussing an HFC phase-down next week at their annual meeting in Bali, Indonesia.

Zaelke stated, “States and cities need to start thinking how they will pay for adaptation and for cleaning up after extreme weather events, including following the precedent set by states in their battle with tobacco companies, which included lawsuits to recoup health care costs the states were paying to care for victims of tobacco injuries.” The lawsuits resulted in a historic \$350 billion national tobacco settlement.

Addressing climate change also requires cutting emissions of CO₂, the principal greenhouse gas, protecting and expanding forests and other “carbon sinks” that remove and store CO₂, and developing other CO₂ removal strategies to draw down excess CO₂ from the atmosphere on a time scale of decades, rather than the millennial time scale of the natural CO₂ removal process.

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