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Environment

HUMAN ACTIVITIES ARE CHANGING EARTH'S CLIMATE



(NBC News) With more confidence than ever before, a prominent scientific body put the blame for global climate change squarely at the feet of humanity's insatiable appetite for fossil fuels, which release heat-trapping gases when burned.

"There is only one thing that is going straight up ... that is the greenhouse gases that we are just pumping at an exponential rate," Gerald North, an atmospheric scientist at Texas A&M University who chaired the committee responsible for the statement, told NBC News.

The statement was released Monday by the American Geophysical Union, a more than 62,000-member-strong organization of Earth and space scientists who come from 144 countries. The non-profit traditionally renews its position statements every four years.

The latest revision uses the most declarative language yet, illustrating increased confidence that human activity is responsible for most of the observed warming of 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit over the past 140 years.

"Human activities are changing Earth's climate," the 537-word statement begins, going on to add that "extensive, independent observations confirm the reality of global warming." Among the observations cited are warming air and sea temperatures, melting glaciers and rising seas.

All of the observations are consistent with physics and predictions of how the climate should change in response to increasing

greenhouse gas emissions, and they're "inconsistent with explanations of climate change that rely on known natural influences," the 15-member committee writes.

The committee said society will face unavoidable consequences from climate change, but there is time to lessen the impacts.

"Actions to diminish the threats posed by climate change to society and ecosystems include substantial cuts to emissions to reduce the magnitude of climate change, as well as preparing for changes that are now unavoidable," the statement says.

One committee member, Roger Pielke Sr., a retired professor of atmospheric sciences at Colorado State University (and father of frequently quoted climate scientist Roger Pielke Jr. at the University of Colorado), dissented from the statement.

In reply to a request for comment, the elder Pielke directed NBC News to a response provided

to Climate Etc., a blog hosted by Georgia Tech climate scientist Judith Curry. Among his criticisms of the statement is what he called an inaccurate "view of climate change that is dominated by the emission of (carbon dioxide) and a few other greenhouse gases" rather than the full complexity of the issue and its uncertainties.

He provided Curry with his own proposed text, which he said is more balanced and "scientifically robust." Curry said she preferred Pielke's response, but questioned "why the AGU or any other professional society is issuing statements on this topic," adding that it is "an explicit statement of advocacy."

Crafting the statement, North said, was anything but easy. Drafts went back and forth among committee members for months, with constant wrangling over wording. For example, North's sole contribution to the statement reads:

"In addition, human-

induced climate change may alter atmospheric circulation, dislocating historical patterns of natural variability and storminess."

"Talk about a storm," he said. "They were all over me. The thing finally did prevail, but just a statement like that, if you have 12 or 13 people who know this or that or the other ... it just goes on and on."

He noted that another statement on the counterintuitive effects of climate change on weather, such as cooling in some regions, has "a little bit" of an edge to it in anticipation that skeptics will point to such cooling as proof the planet isn't warming.

The statement notes that impacts from climate change will be myriad and harmful, ranging from extreme weather events to threats to agriculture and coastal infrastructure.

"While important scientific uncertainties remain as to which particular impacts will be experienced where," the statement reads, "no uncertainties are known that could make the impacts of climate change inconsequential."

The statement is short on policy prescriptions to combat global climate change. North said policy is something that makes climate scientists as a group uncomfortable, but he added that adaptation will be key, given the political impasse on curbing emissions.

"I think it is going to be very, very hard for the world to come to grips with this," he said. "So one thing we really need to do is think about adaptation: How are we going to adapt to climate change?"

Celebrity

ETHAN HAWKE ON UMA THURMAN'S MARRIAGE VOW



(Us Weekly) If Ethan Hawke knew 15 years ago what he knows now, he might never have made it down the aisle. Reflecting on his past in a new interview for the September issue of Elle magazine, the "Before Midnight" actor, now 42, admits that he probably wasn't ready to make a commitment as big as marriage when he said "I do" to ex-wife Uma Thurman in 1998. But at the time, he thought it would give his increasingly hectic lifestyle some stability.

"Success when you're young is really overwhelming," he explains to Elle. "The world felt out of control. And I wanted to stop it from spinning so fast. I thought marriage would decrease my variables or something. I was absolutely wrong."

Hawke — 27 when he wed Thurman, with whom he shares daughter Maya, 14, and son Levon, 10 — notes that he was likely too immature, both emotionally and biologically, to make such a huge decision. "There

was this discovery that the male brain isn't done until 28. I definitely think my frontal lobe was not finished," he confesses. "I had no business taking vows that would last more than two weeks."

"My personal opinion? The guy who's got it right is Derek Jeter," he continues. "He lives his life like, 'Hey man, I play shortstop for the

New York Yankees. And I'm not going to get married until I'm no longer a shortstop for the New York Yankees.' Which is incredibly smart."

Hawke and Thurman were married for five years before separating in 2003. Two years later, in August 2005, they finalized their divorce. Since then, the "Total Recall" actor has remarried; he

and wife Ryan Hawke (nee Shawhughes) wed in 2008 and have two young daughters, Clementine and Indiana.

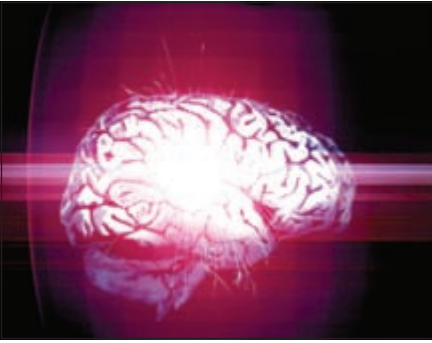
The father of four also opens up to Elle about life before Thurman. One particularly fond memory? His first time having sex.

"I was very, very lucky," he recalls. "I lost my virginity to someone I cared for very much and who cared very much for me. The thing that's so important for young people to know is that, if you use protection, sex is one of the few vices you can have as a young person."

That said, you should choose your partners wisely. Hawke tells Elle he struggled early on to find women who liked him for him rather than the romantic characters he played in movies. "I can't tell you how many times in the '90s I'd meet somebody, we'd be having a nice time, and they'd sigh and go, 'This is exactly like 'Before Sunrise,'" he says. "And I'd have to get up and leave."

Health

Brain-eating amoeba remains rare, and deadly



(NBC News) A 12-year-old Arkansas girl infected with a brain-eating amoeba is on the mend and may be only the third person known to have survived the baffling infection, doctors said Wednesday. She's recovering just as a 12-year-old boy in Miami struggles for his life with the same infection.

Doctors note the infection is still extremely rare — so rare that health officials don't know how to track it or protect against it. They're also not sure why Kali Hardig of Little Rock appears to be recovering, but federal health officials are relaying details about her treatment to the team treating Zachary Reyna in Miami.

The amoeba is called Naegleria fowleri, and it's found in warm, fresh waters all over the world. It's been seen in hot springs and swimming holes, freshwater lakes and even in neti pots used to clean out sinuses.

It infects people through the nose, traveling up the nerve cells that carry smell signals into the brain. Doctors are not sure how or why a very few people are susceptible, but it's clear that having water forced up into the sinuses, perhaps by dunking or diving, is an important factor.

Kali became ill after swimming at a water park fed by spring water in Little Rock. Doctors at Arkansas Children's Hospital tried the standard approach — a cocktail of four antibiotics — but also used an experimental antifungal drug and an unusual approach that involved lowering her body temperature.

"Whether that had an impact on her care is hard to say," Dr. Matt Linam, an infectious disease specialist at Arkansas Children's, told NBC News. But after three weeks in the hospital, Kali is semi-conscious.

"She hears when they ask a question and can shake her head yes or no and give a thumbs up," hospital spokesman Tom Bonner said.

The infection caused by N. fowleri is called primary amoebic meningoencephalitis — PAM for short. It's an inflammation of the brain and because an amoeba causes it, there's not an easy treatment. The early symptoms look a lot like a cold or flu, so it can take a while to diagnose. Meanwhile, the amoeba is feeding on brain cells.

Symptoms don't usually begin until about a week after someone's been in the water, so it is not always immediately clear what the cause might be. "PAM is difficult to detect because the disease progresses rapidly so that diagnosis is usually made after death," the CDC says.

Kali was lucky because she got treated fast, Linam says. Her mother knew something was badly wrong and got her to the hospital.

"Our lab was able to identify the Naegleria pretty quickly," Linam says. "That gave us a leg up. We were able to get started on the right medicines early. Even six to 12 hours later and we probably wouldn't be having this conversation."

Only about 130 cases of Naegleria infection have been reported since 1962, making it one of the rarest of infections. For that reason, it's almost never the first thing doctors would suspect.

"With thousands and thousands, if not millions, of people swimming in warm, fresh water in the south, just having the story that someone went and swam in a lake or something like doesn't mean you are going to get Naegleria," Linam says.

"Hundreds of millions of visits to swimming venues occur each year in the U.S. that result in 0-8 infections per year," the CDC says on its website. "The extremely low occurrence of PAM makes epidemiologic study difficult; it is unknown why certain persons become infected with the amoebae while millions of others exposed to warm recreational fresh waters do not."

And Kali did not look any different at first — although doctors were very worried because bacterial meningitis is extremely dangerous.