

The Myth of an Overheated Planet



People visit the Brooklyn Bridge during hot weather in New York City, July 13, 2023. (Eduardo Munoz/Reuters)

Share ➔

269 Comments 💬



Listen ▶

By **ALEX EPSTEIN**

August 5, 2023 6:30 AM

This year's hot temperatures are part of a slow warming trend on a planet where far more people die from cold than from heat, and where we need fossil fuels to protect us from both.

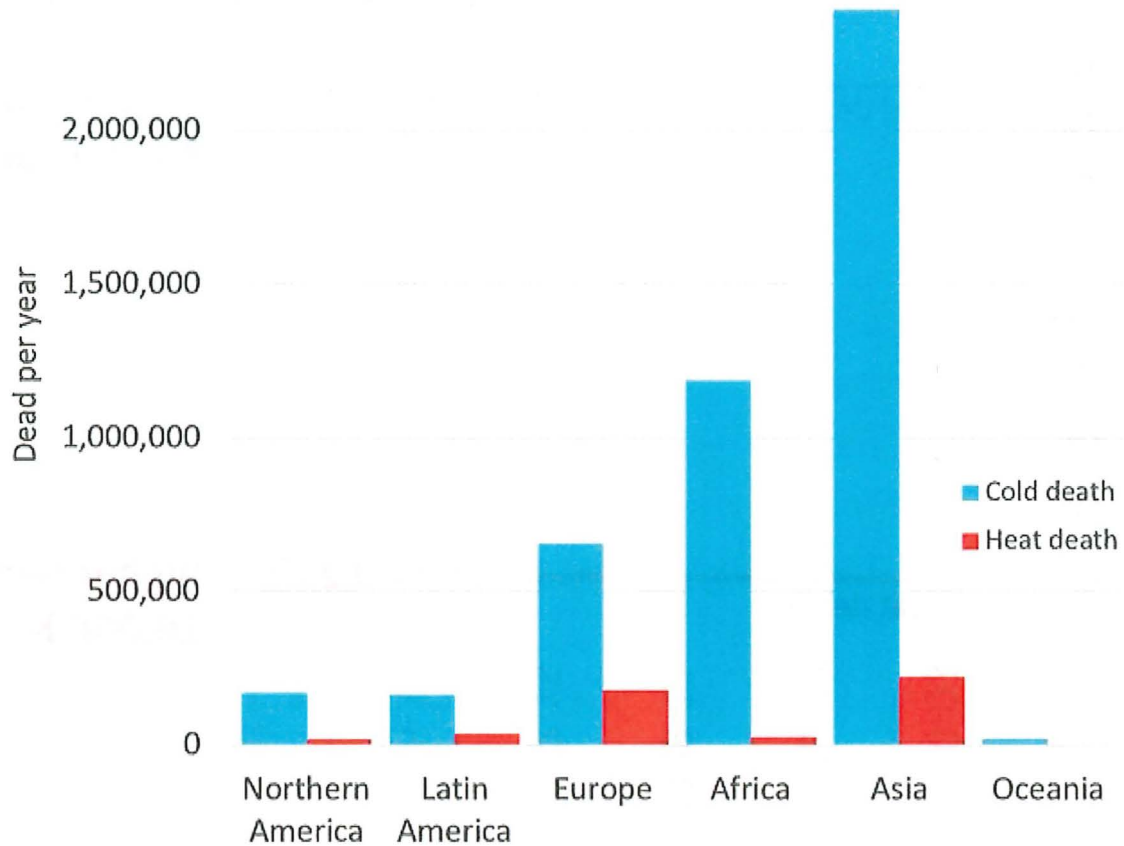
MYTH: *This year's hot temperatures show that fossil fuels are already making Earth unlivably hot.*

Truth: *This year's hot temperatures are part of a slow warming trend on a planet where far more people die from cold than from heat, and where we need fossil fuels to protect us from both.*

The myth of an overheated planet is destroyed with four facts:

- i. Cold-related deaths > heat-related deaths
 - ii. Earth is warming slowly, and less in warm places
 - iii. Fossil fuels make us safer from dangerous temperatures
 - iv. Anti-fossil-fuel policies increase the danger from cold and heat
- Leading media outlets are portraying this summer's temperatures as unlivably hot, and offering the rapid adoption of anti-fossil-fuel policies as a solution. In reality, cold is a far bigger problem than heat — and anti-fossil-fuel policies will make us more endangered by both.
 - Anyone commenting responsibly on summer temps must acknowledge four facts:
 - **1. Cold-related deaths > heat-related deaths.** When our leaders discuss the warming of the planet, they treat warming as obviously bad. But while they portray the planet as already “too hot,” the fact is that far more human beings die of cold than of heat.
 - Study after study has found that deaths from cold outnumber deaths from heat by 5–15 times. On every continent, cold is more dangerous than heat. Even in many countries we think of as especially hot, such as India, cold-related deaths significantly exceed heat-related deaths:

***Lancet*: More Cold Death Than Heat Death Everywhere**

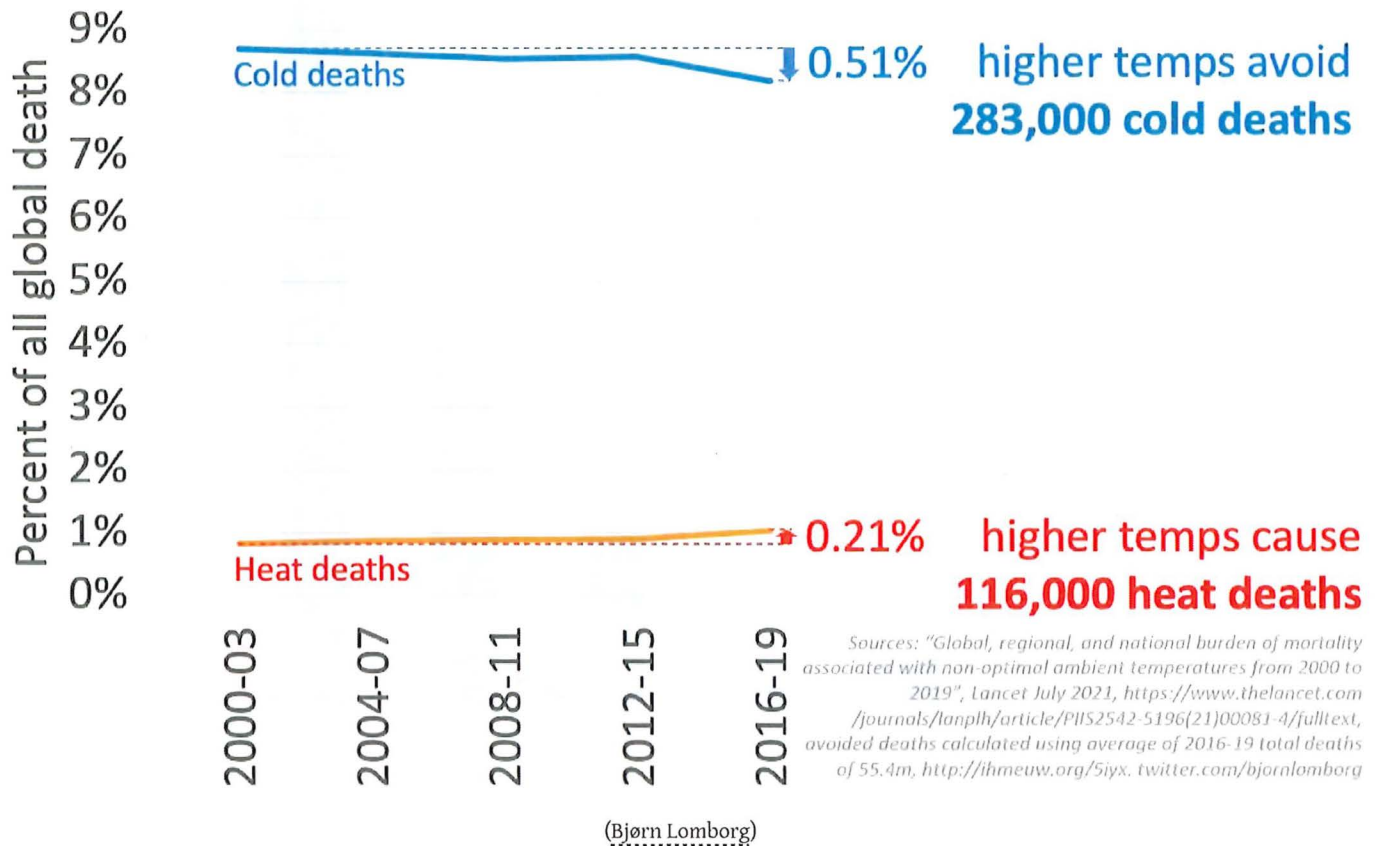


Annual dead from heat and cold across world 2000-19. Latin America includes the Carribean. Sources: "Global, regional, and national burden of mortality associated with non-optimal ambient temperatures from 2000 to 2019", Lancet July 2021, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00081-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00081-4/fulltext), table 1, twitter.com/bjornlomborg

(Bjørn Lomborg)

- The fact that far more human beings die of cold than of heat means that, for the foreseeable future, even without accounting for the heating and cooling benefits of fossil fuels, fossil-fueled global warming will save more lives from cold than it will take from heat:

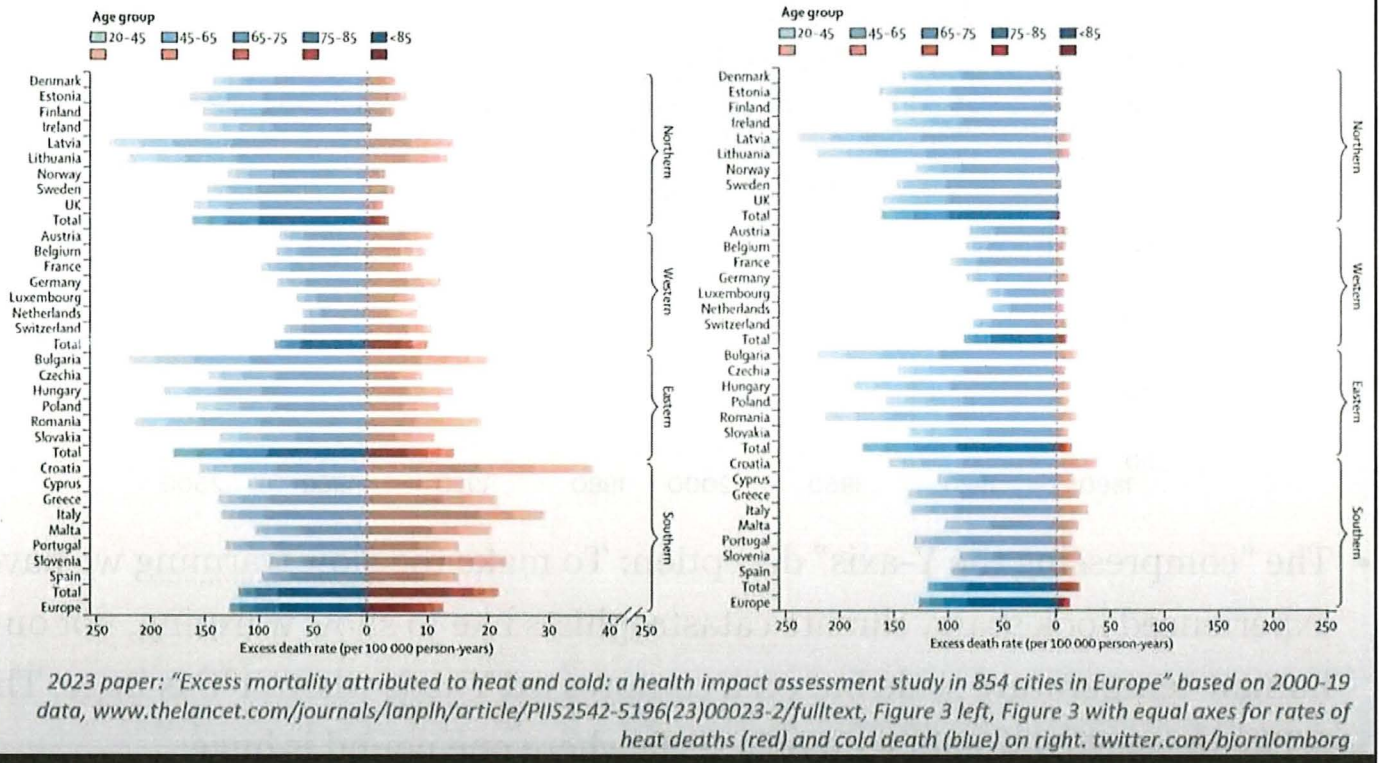
Lancet: Each year warming saves 166,000 lives



- Every story about warming and human mortality should obviously mention that deaths from cold are the biggest source of temperature-related mortality. But almost no story about warming mentions this! This level of ignorance and/or dishonesty cannot be tolerated.
- Much of the medical community has been particularly shameful in treating warming as catastrophic. Observe how the prestigious journal *The Lancet* drastically exaggerated the threat of heat death by making each heat death show up five times larger than each cold death on this bar chart:

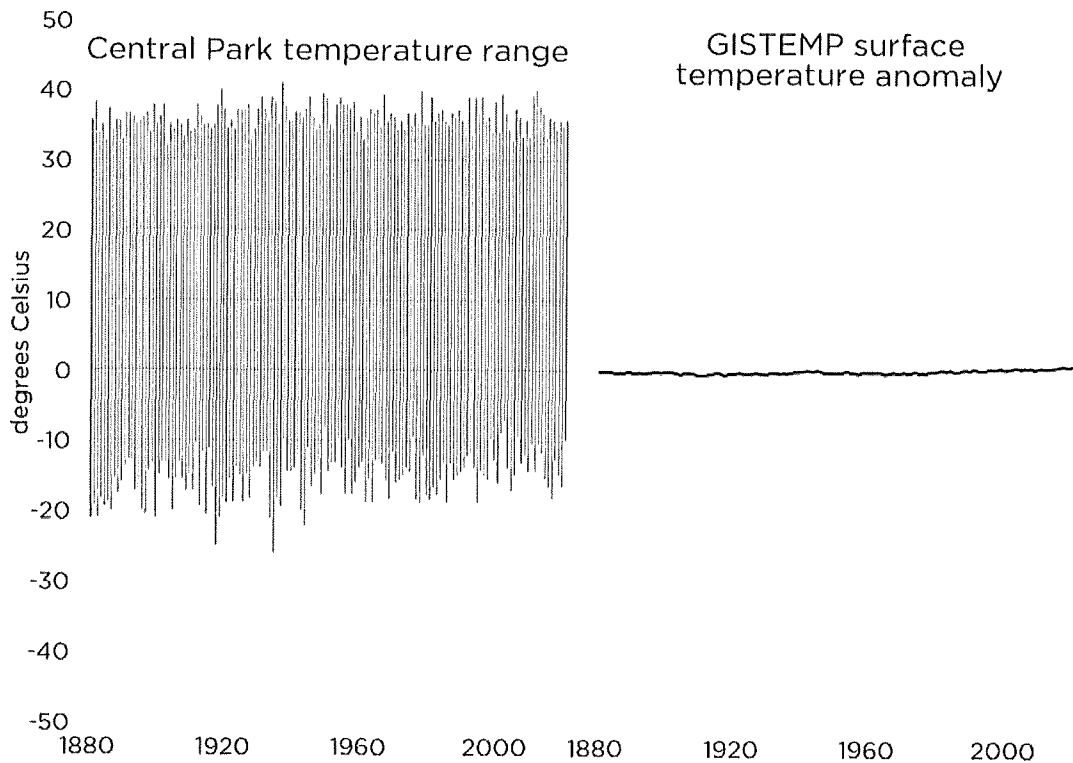
10x more Cold Deaths than Heat Deaths in Europe

On the left, how it is presented, on the right with equal axes

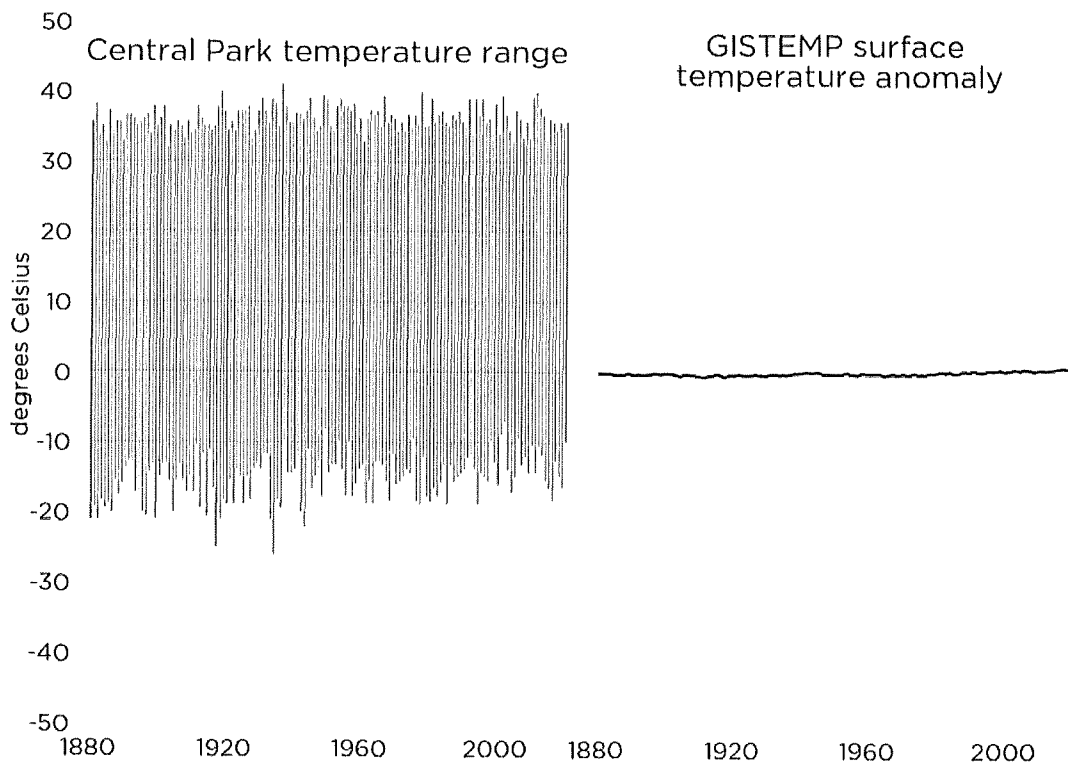


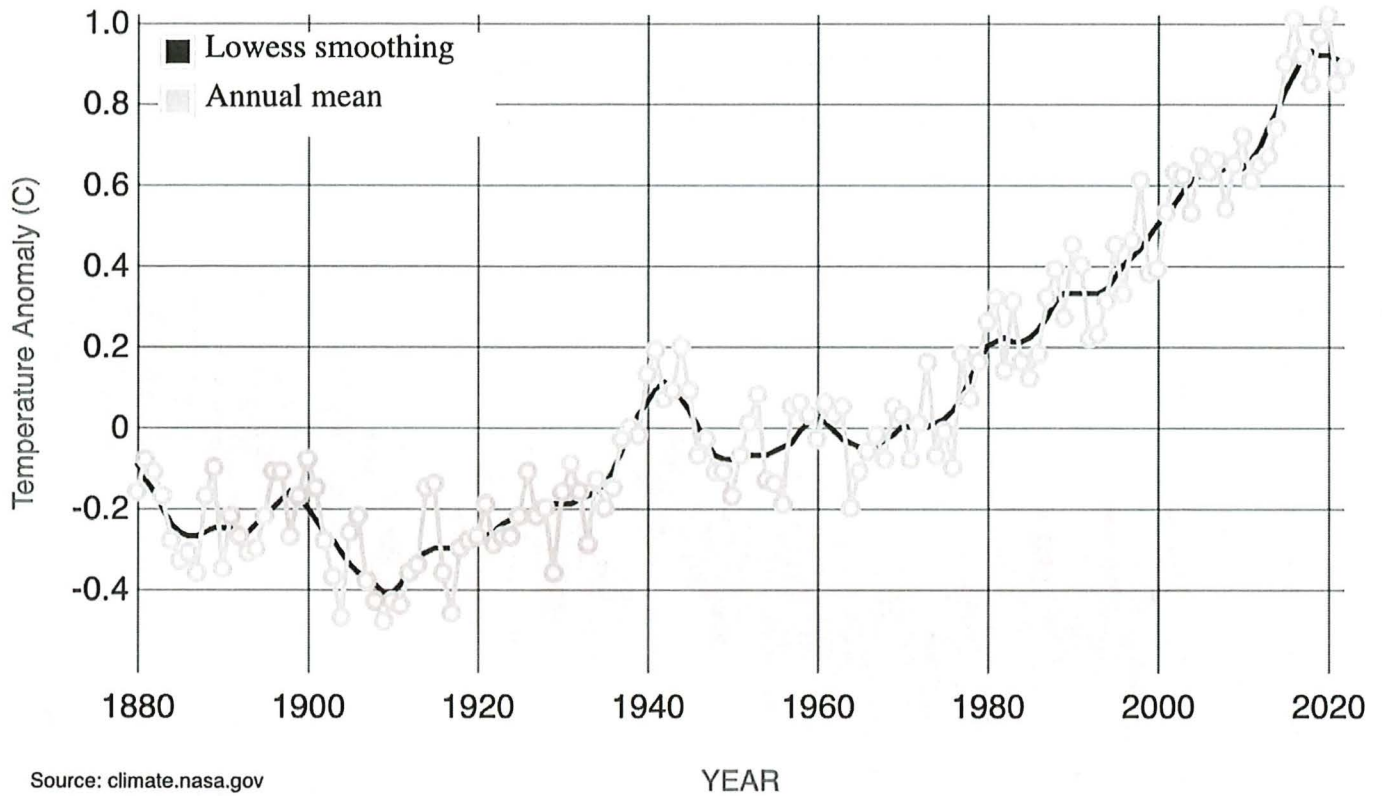
(Bjørn Lomborg)

- **2. Earth is warming slowly — and less in warm places.** So far, we've had ~1°C of warming from a cold starting point in Earth's history 150 years ago. And future warming will be limited by the diminishing nature of "the greenhouse effect" — as well as being concentrated in colder places.
- If we remember that cold kills more than heat, and we compare the ~1° C (~2° F) average warming that has occurred over the last 150 years with the wide range of temps we deal with every day/month/year, we will not be scared at all. So climate catastrophists use deceptions to scare us:



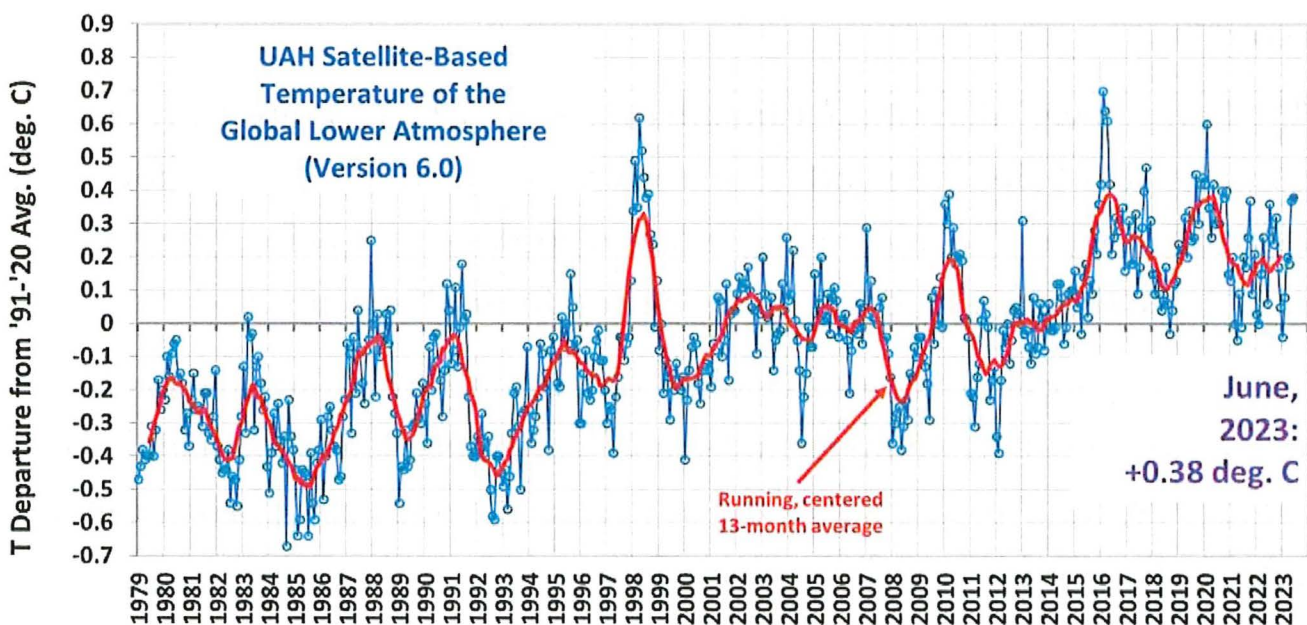
- The “compressing the Y-axis” deception: To make the slow warming we have experienced look scary, climate catastrophists like to show warming, not on a human-temperature scale but on a compressed Y-axis where 1°C is huge. This is like measuring weight gain on a scale where one pound is huge:



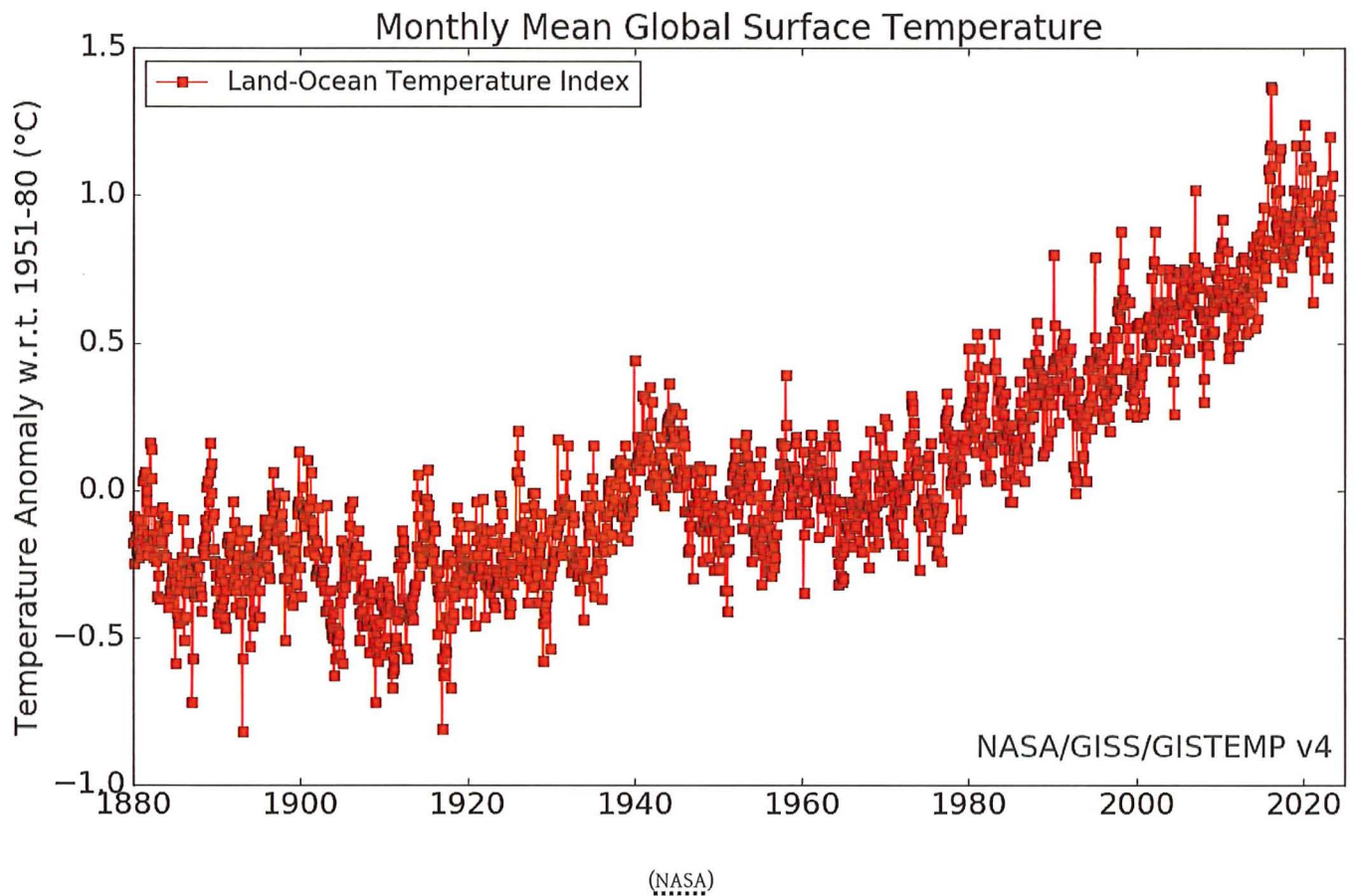


(Climate.NASA.gov)

- The “hottest on record” deception: We hear constant alarming-sounding claims that we are in or near “the hottest year on record.” But given that records began at a cold time, and we’re experiencing slow warming, of course any given year we can expect a new record. So what?



(Roy.Spencer/drroyspencer.com)

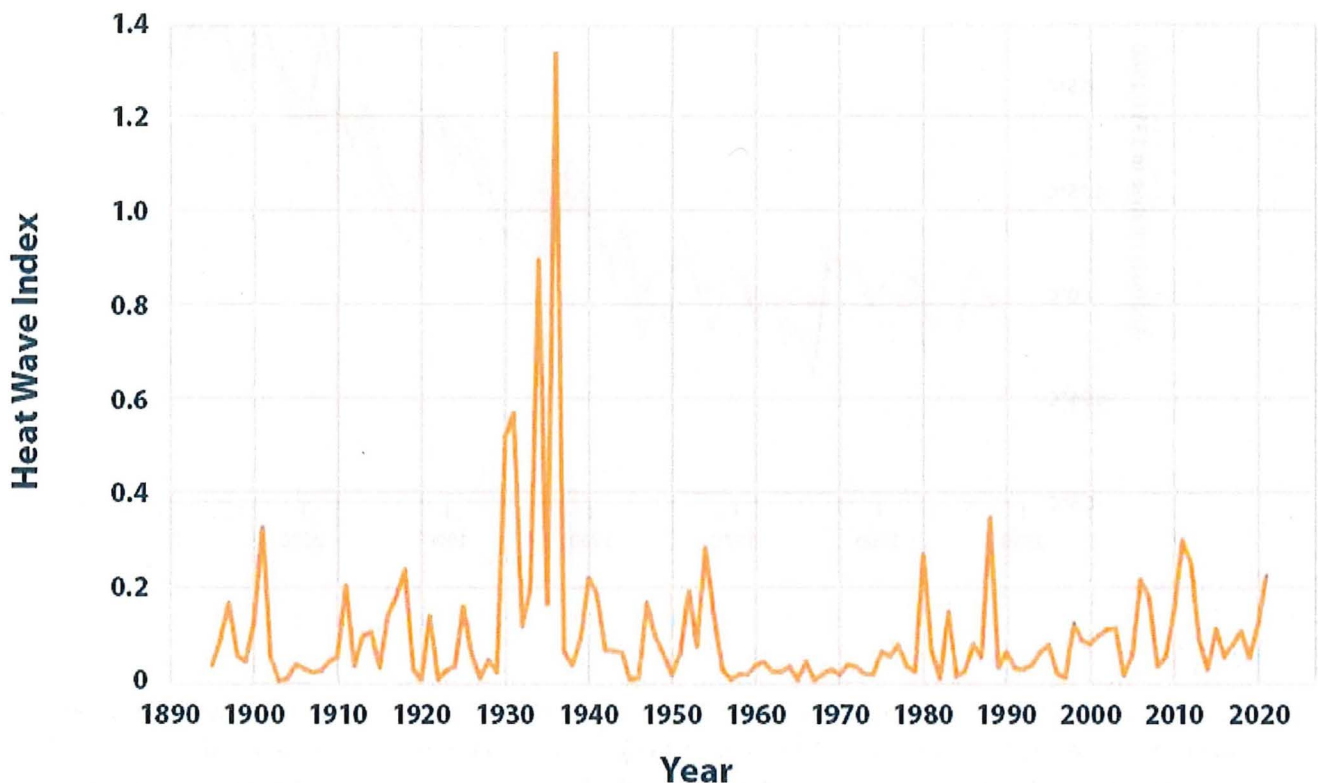


- Given our limited temperature records, alarming us about a “hottest year on record” during a slow warming period is like a doctor alarming a patient who gains 1/10th of a pound of muscle by saying that it’s his “heaviest year on record.”
- The “hottest ever” deception: Climate catastrophists often absurdly equate a month or year being “the hottest on record” — which refers to the fewer than 200 years we have detailed temperature records — with being “the hottest ever.” Even though Earth was 25°F warmer for millions of years!
- The “treating local extremes as global” deception: Given the slow pace of global warming, local temp changes tend to be much larger than global ones. To scare us, catastrophists take the hottest local temps and portray them as global so we think everywhere is very hot.
- An example of treating local extremes as global has been the national media’s focus on Texas when Texas has been “abnormally” hot while ignoring the

many places that have been “abnormally” cool.

- For some true perspective on heat waves, look at the U.S. Annual Heat Wave Index from the EPA, which says “longer-term records show that heat waves in the 1930s remain the most severe in recorded U.S. history.” Today’s “reporting” would give you no indication that this is the case:

U.S. Annual Heat Wave Index, 1895–2021



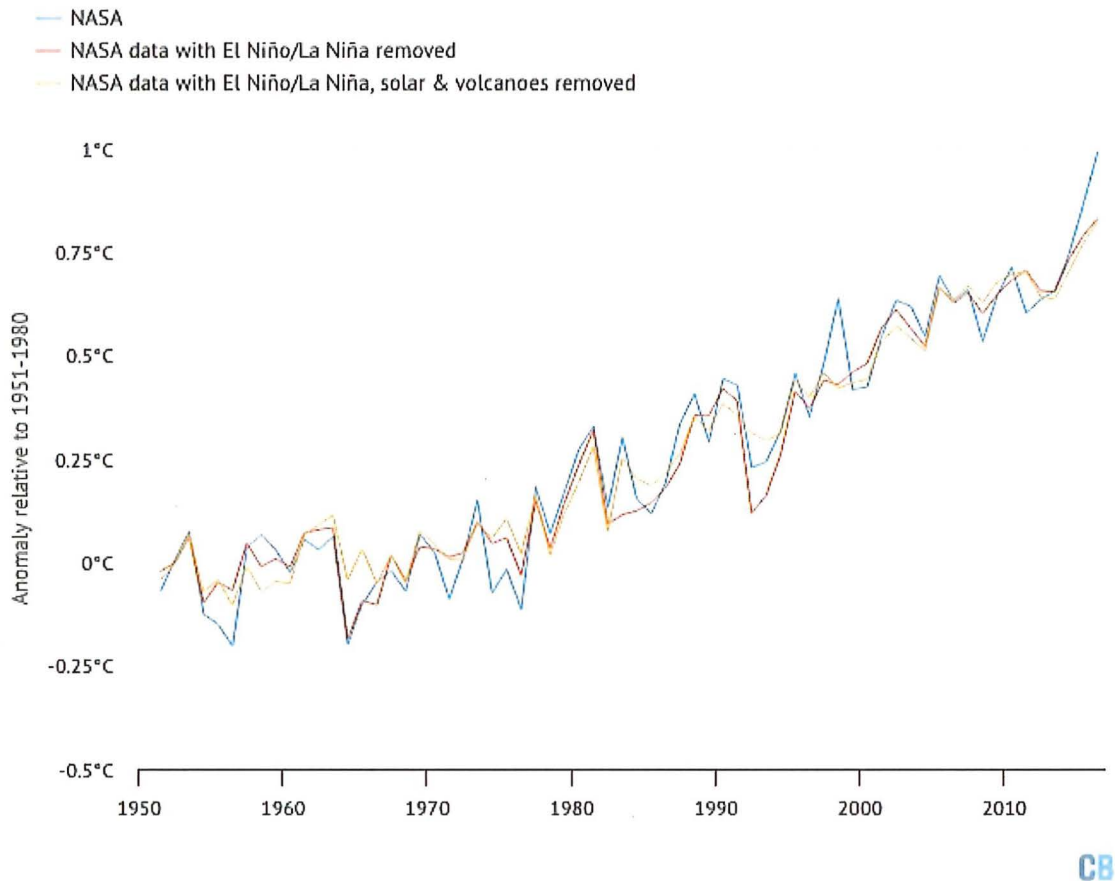
Data source: Kunkel, K. 2022. Updated version of Figure 2.3 in: CCSP (U.S. Climate Change Science Program). 2008. Synthesis and Assessment Product 3.3: Weather and climate extremes in a changing climate.
www.globalchange.gov/browse/reports/sap-33-weather-and-climate-extremes-changing-climate.

For more information, visit U.S. EPA’s “Climate Change Indicators in the United States” at www.epa.gov/climate-indicators.

(EPA)

- The “treating El Niño warming as global warming” deception: On top of slow global warming, we experience additional warming due to the change from La Niña to El Niño. This is a temporary phenomenon, not a climate trend, but catastrophists exploit it to exaggerate global warming:

Global surface temperature

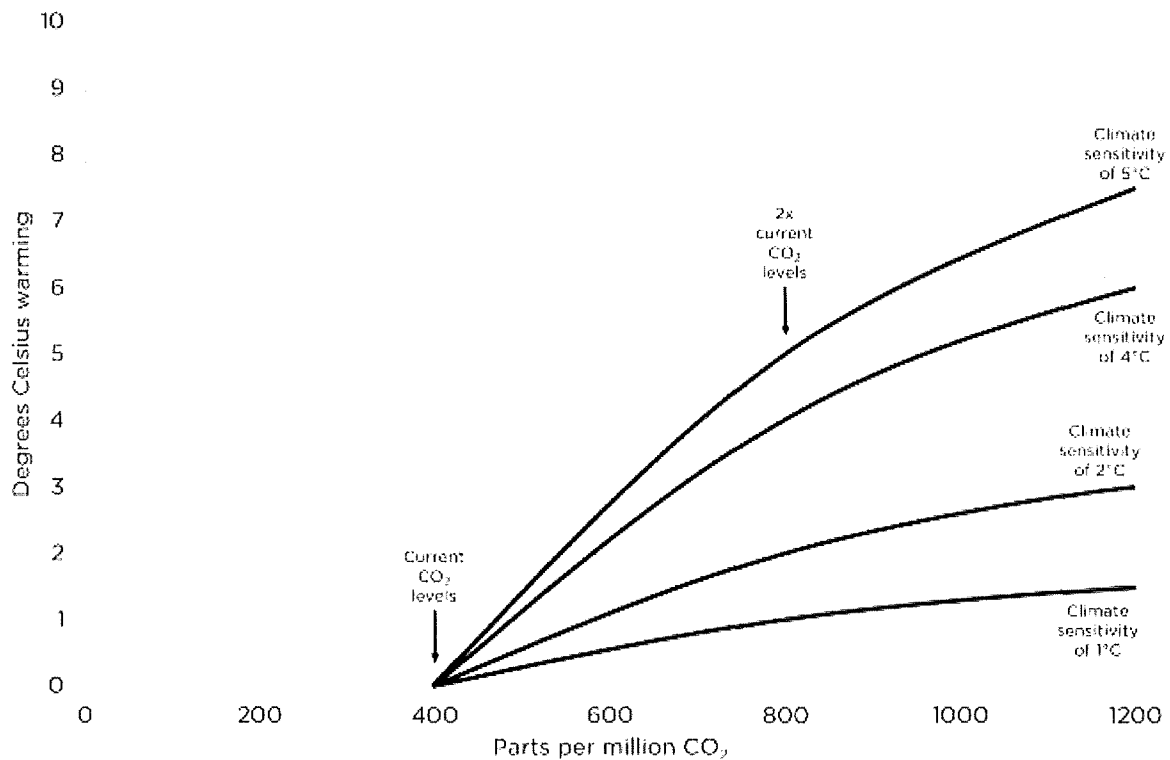


Global average surface temperature as measured by the NASA GISS Surface Temperature Analysis (GISTEMP) (blue); with the effects of El Niño/La Niña removed (red); and with El Niño/La Niña, solar activity and volcanic eruptions removed. Data obtained from Tamino ([Open Mind](#)), graph by Rosamund Pearce for Carbon Brief using [Highcharts](#).

([CarbonBrief.org](#))

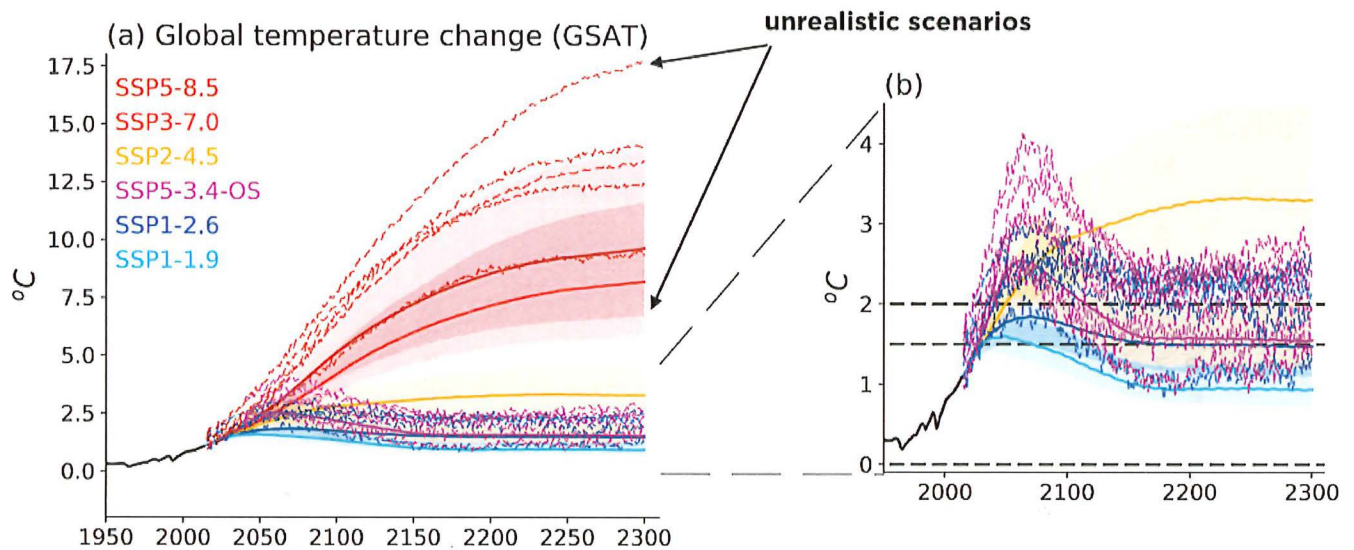
- Warming so far has been slow and benign. But will future warming make the world unlivably hot? No, given two facts almost universally acknowledged by climate scientists: 1) the diminishing warming impact of CO₂ and 2) the concentration of warming in colder places.
- The warming impact of CO₂ diminishes (“logarithmically”) as it increases in concentration. Every new molecule of CO₂ we add to the atmosphere has less of a warming effect than the previous one. Warming will diminish as emissions increase — the only question is at what rate. (Equilibrium climate

sensitivity is defined as a warming in °C per doubling of greenhouse-gas concentrations in the atmosphere. The IPCC – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – estimates it to be between 2.5°C and 4°C. Other analysis suggests it to be below 2°C.)



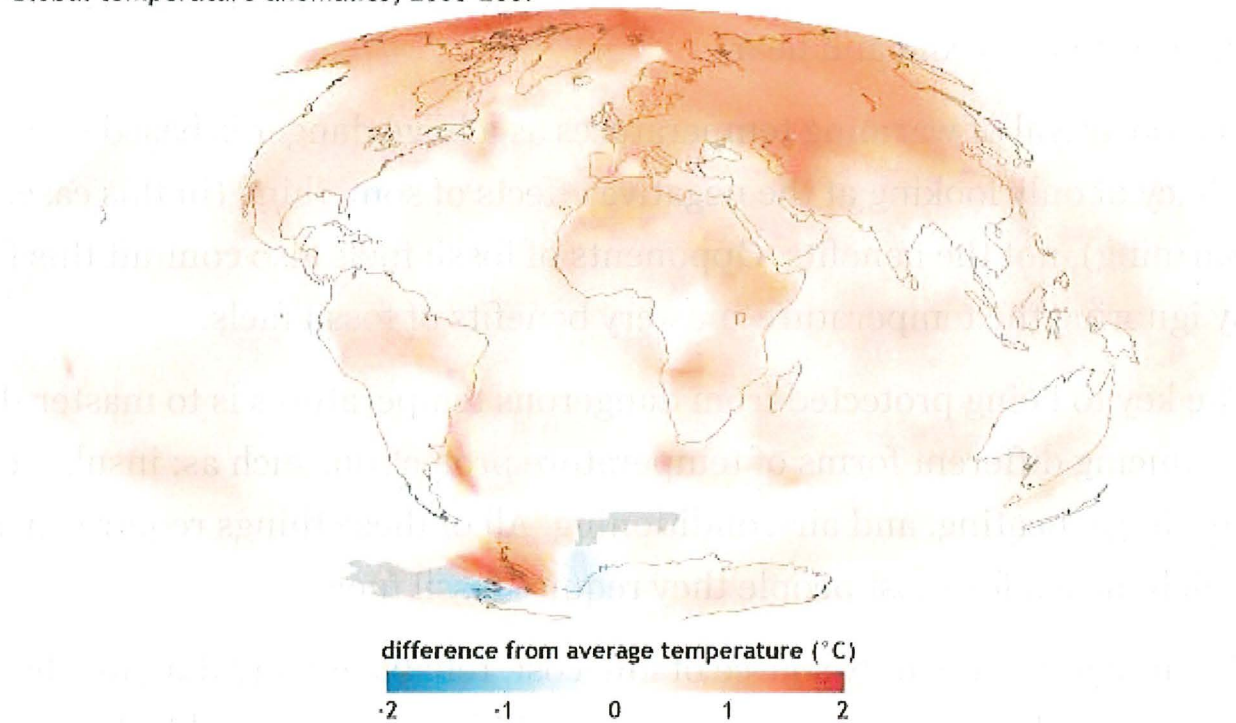
(Alex Epstein)

- Even the most wildly implausible “scenarios” from the anti-fossil-fuel IPCC include diminishing warming and a highly livable world with an increasing population:

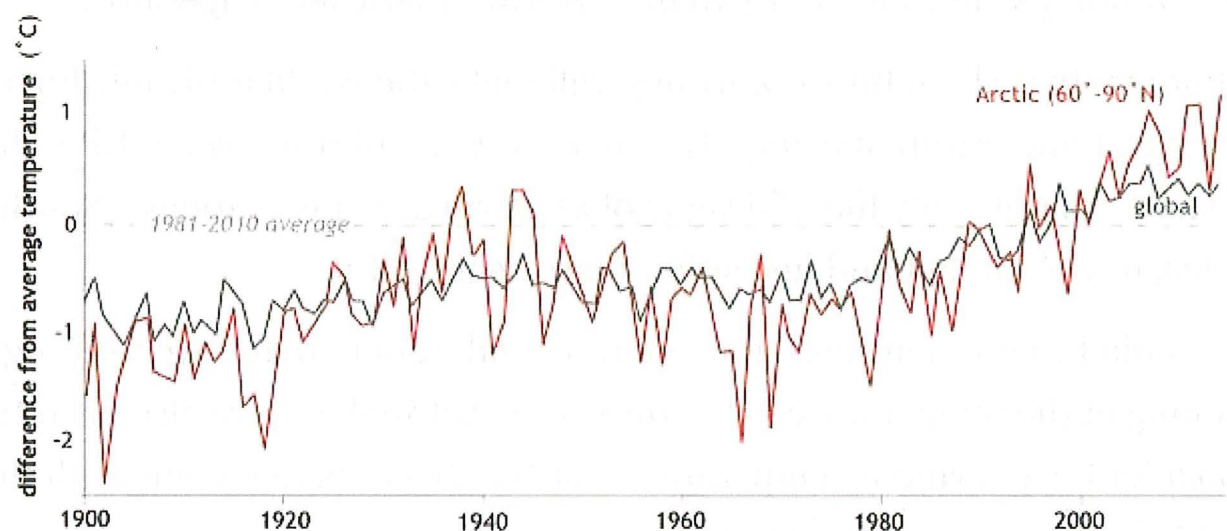


- Climate warming is concentrated in colder areas of the world (such as the Arctic), during colder times of day, and during colder seasons.
- This means that future warming will occur more in cold situations where it saves lives than in hot situations where it causes problems:

Global temperature anomalies, 2000-2009



Arctic versus global temperatures anomalies, 1900-2014



(Climate.gov)

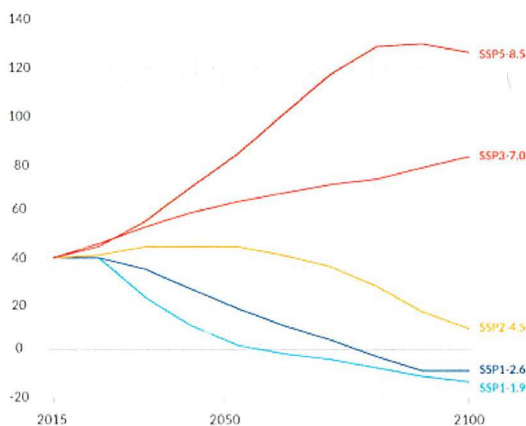
- All reporting on the warming of the Earth should specify not only that humans are far more endangered by cold than by heat, but also that Earth is warming slowly — and less in warm places. That virtually no reporting acknowledges this shows that much “reporting” is propaganda.
- **3. Fossil fuels make us safer from dangerous temperatures.** Not only is the warming from fossil fuels’ CO₂ emissions slow and in many ways

beneficial, the uniquely cost-effective energy we get from fossil fuels makes us safer from both cold and heat.

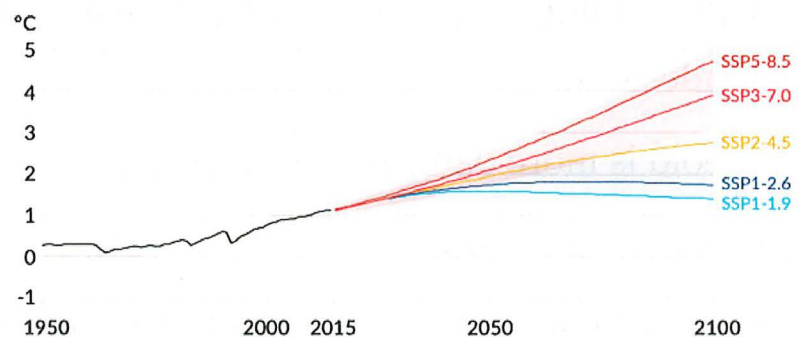
- The portrayal of warming temperatures as a huge danger is based on the fallacy of only looking at the negative effects of something (in this case, warming), not the benefits. Opponents of fossil fuels also commit this fallacy by ignoring the temperature-mastery benefits of fossil fuels.
- The key to being protected from dangerous temperatures is to master them by producing different forms of temperature protection, such as: insulated buildings, heating, and air-conditioning. All of these things require energy — which means for most people they require fossil fuels.
- Fossil fuels are the only source of low-cost, reliable energy that, for the foreseeable future, can provide energy to billions — in a world where 3 billion people still use less electricity than a typical American refrigerator.
- “Studies” that claim future warming will make the world unlivably hot are denying temperature mastery. E.g., one assessment used by the EPA absurdly assumes that if a city like Chicago got as warm as some of today’s Southern cities, it won’t adapt and just suffer mass heat death!
- It should be common sense for reporters and leaders that if we’re going to be looking at the temperature side-effects of fossil-fuel use, we also need to consider the enormous temperature-mastery benefits that come with them. But this common sense is almost never practiced.
- **4. Anti-fossil-fuel policies increase danger from cold and heat.** The number one thing that will determine people’s safety from cold and heat for decades to come is the availability of cost-effective energy. Anti-fossil-fuel policies will increase both cold deaths and heat deaths.
- On a planet where people die much more from cold than from heat, but both are major threats, the key to safety is to have energy be as affordable and plentiful as possible so as many as possible can afford heating and air conditioning. For the foreseeable future, this means more fossil fuels.

- Even though billions need fossil fuels to protect themselves from cold (above all) and heat, today's media and leaders pretend that heat is the only problem and the solution is to follow anti-fossil-fuel policies that will supposedly cool the Earth. This is breathtakingly dishonest.
- Not only do anti-fossil-fuel policies deprive people of the energy they need to protect themselves from both cold and heat, these policies cannot cool the Earth for at least several decades, and only then if the whole world, including China, follows them absolutely.
- Even if 100 percent net-zero energy is just decades away (absurd) that won't even have a tiny cooling impact until emissions are zero (or negative) and today's warming energy dissipates.
- To portray anti-fossil-fuel policies as cooling in any way anytime soon is dishonest:

Carbon dioxide (GtCO₂/yr)




a) Global surface temperature change relative to 1850-1900



- Dangerously cold and hot temperatures are by far the most problematic for poor people. What they need is more fossil-fuel energy for air conditioning and heating now, not a climate and energy policy that prevents real future low-emission solutions and makes energy expensive now.

- Anyone offering advice on how to deal with hot temperatures is obligated to give advice that will actually help human beings for the foreseeable future. Pretending that supporting anti-fossil-fuel policies will help people anytime soon by cooling the Earth is a lie.
- Not only is it a lie that anti-fossil-fuel policies will protect people anytime soon by cooling the Earth, it is a deadly lie — because in practice it means preventing people from acquiring the air conditioning they need to deal with warm temperatures today and in the future.
- The only moral and practical way to reduce CO₂ emissions — a global phenomenon — is innovation that makes low-carbon energy globally cost-competitive. So long as fossil fuels are the most cost-competitive option, especially in developing nations, they will (rightly) choose to emit CO₂.
- Reducing CO₂ emissions in a humane and practical way means focusing on liberating alternatives — especially the most potent, nuclear — to try to truly outcompete fossil fuels in the future. Depriving us off fossil fuels now and pretending China will follow suit is immoral and impractical.
- Hillary Clinton blaming pro-fossil-fuel “MAGA Republicans” for hot temps evades that:
 - cold is more dangerous than heat;
 - warming is slow;
 - we need fossil fuels to protect us from cold and heat;
 - anti-fossil-fuel policies won’t cool the Earth but will kill people; and
 - CO₂ emissions are global.
- Many people rightly took Hillary blaming political opponents for hot weather as beyond the pale. And it was. At the same time, she is just regurgitating climate falsehoods that have become commonplace among our leaders. Please share these talking points to refute those falsehoods.

Share 

269 Comments 



