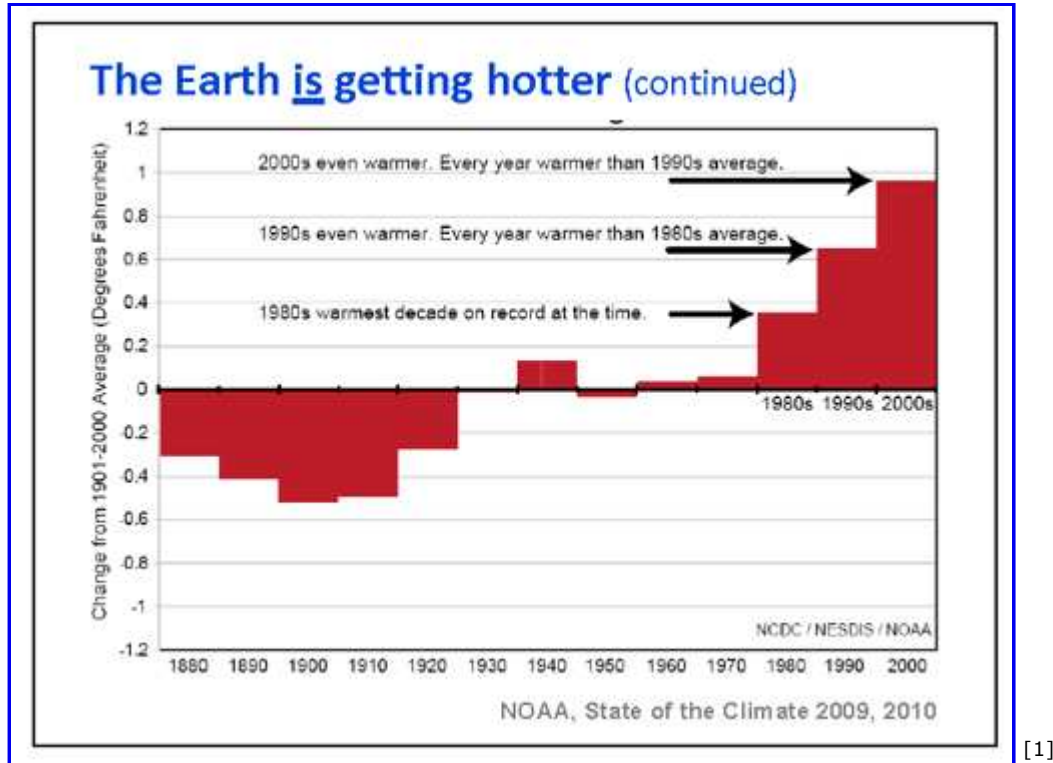


- Climate Progress - <http://climateprogress.org> -

Climate disruption caused by global warming driven by human emissions of greenhouse gases

Posted By [Joe](#) On September 21, 2010 @ 6:31 pm In [Science](#) | [34 Comments](#)



Last week [Fox News](#) [2] and other conservative media outlets tried once again to fabricate controversy over climate science when they pounced on a [presentation](#) [3] made by the President's science adviser Dr. John Holdren in Oslo. In it, Holdren makes the case (for the umpteenth time) that it's time to move past the oversimplified term "global warming" and start facing the painful reality that without sharply reducing our carbon pollution, we face something more akin to a "global climate disruption."

Sadly, even the *Atlantic* monthly (which is seen as center-left but is [center-right](#) [4] on climate) repeated the right-wing narrative that the White House was somehow pushing new rhetoric in place of real science with its stenographic post, "[Right Has Field Day With New 'Global Warming' Term](#) [5]." Ironically, the *Atlantic* criticized Holdren's phrase "global climate disruption" while its own construction "the scientifically supported but nevertheless controversial theory of global warming" is risible. Yes, well, it is only "controversial" if one buys into and keeps repeating right-wing anti-science talking points.

I've been writing about efforts to come up with a better term than "global warming" for a long time (see "[Is 'Global Weirding' here?](#)" [6] Humans are warming the globe and changing the climate. But what should we call it?). I myself tried to coin the term "[Hell and High Water](#)" [7] a few years ago, since that is a more accurate description of what is to come if we stay on or near our current emissions path. It didn't take — even though *Time* magazine used the phrase for its [Pakistan flooding story](#) [8], which didn't mention global warming and which wasn't shared with U.S. readers anyway!

It was GOP strategist and wordmeister Frank Luntz who counseled in a confidential [2003 memo](#) [9] that the Administration and conservatives should [stop using the term "global warming"](#) [10] because it was too frightening:

It's time for us to start talking about "climate change" instead of global warming and "conservation" instead of preservation.

1) "Climate change" is less frightening than "global warming". As one focus group participant noted, climate change "sounds like you're going from Pittsburgh to Fort Lauderdale." While global warming has catastrophic connotations attached to it, climate change suggests a more controllable and less emotional challenge.

So let's set the record straight on two points. Holdren's speech focused on laying out the rock-solid and increasingly dire science (must-see PPTs [here](#) ^[3]). And *the term he was recommending is essentially identical to one that he and many other scientists suggested 13 years ago:*

Scientists' Statement [11] **Global Climatic Disruption**

June 18, 1997

We are scientists who are familiar with the causes and effects of climatic change as summarized recently by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). We endorse those reports and observe that the further accumulation of greenhouse gases commits the earth irreversibly to further global climatic change and consequent ecological, economic and social disruption. The risks associated with such changes justify preventive action through reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases. In ratifying the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United States agreed in principle to reduce its emissions. It is time for the United States, as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, to fulfill this commitment and demonstrate leadership in a global effort.

Human-induced global climatic change is under way. The IPCC concluded that global mean surface air temperature has increased by between about 0.5 and 1.1 degrees Fahrenheit in the last 100 years and anticipates a further continuing rise of 1.8 to 6.3 degrees Fahrenheit during the next century. Sea-level has risen on average 4-10 inches during the past 100 years and is expected to rise another 6 inches to 3 feet by 2100. Global warming from the increase in heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere causes an amplified hydrological cycle resulting in increased precipitation and flooding in some regions and more severe aridity in other areas. The IPCC concluded that "The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate." The warming is expected to expand the geographical ranges of malaria and dengue fever and to open large new areas to other human diseases and plant and animal pests. Effects of the disruption of climate are sufficiently complicated that it is appropriate to assume there will be effects not now anticipated.

Our familiarity with the scale, severity, and costs to human welfare of the disruptions that the climatic changes threaten leads us to introduce this note of urgency and to call for early domestic action to reduce U.S. emissions via the most cost-effective means. We encourage other nations to join in similar actions with the purpose of producing a substantial and progressive global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions beginning immediately. We call attention to the fact that there are financial as well as environmental advantages to reducing emissions. More than 2000 economists recently observed that there are many potential policies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions for which total benefits outweigh the total costs.

The Framework Convention on Climate Change, ratified by the United States and more than 165 other nations, calls for stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at levels that will protect human interests and nature. The Parties to the Convention will meet in December, 1997, in Kyoto, Japan to prepare a protocol implementing the convention. We urge that the United States enter that meeting with a clear national plan to limit emissions, and a recommendation as to how the U.S. will assist other nations in significant steps toward achieving the joint purpose of stabilization.

Initial Signatories

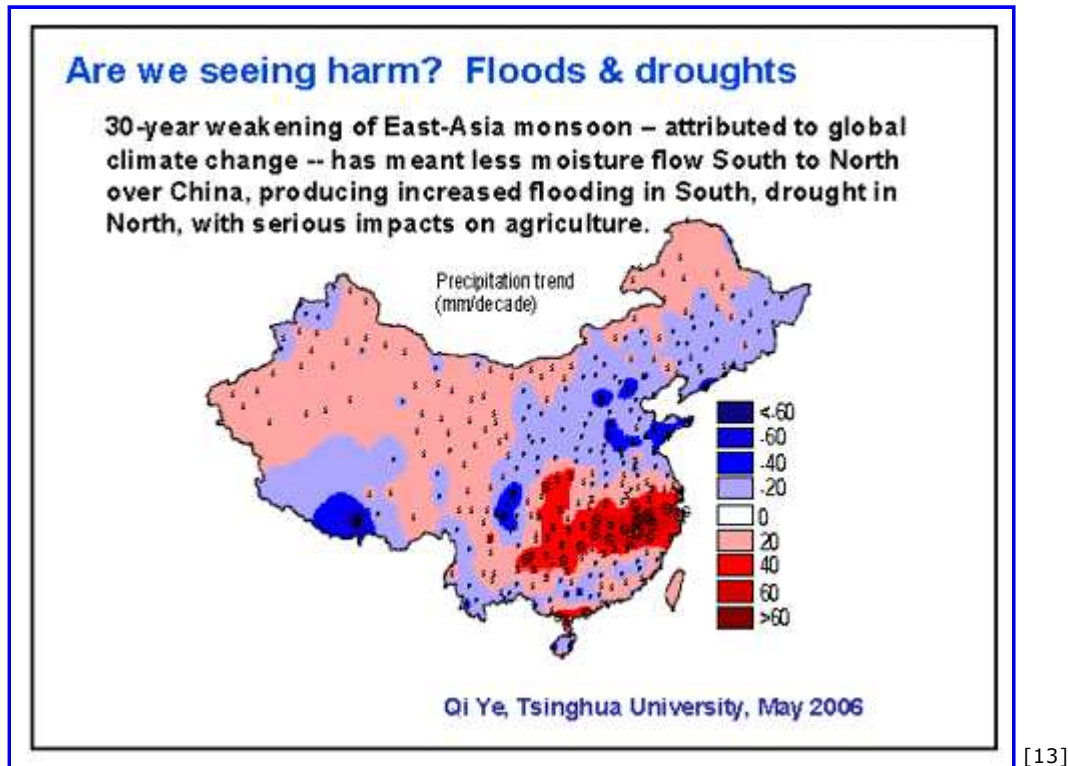
- Dr. John P. Holdren
- Dr. Jane Lubchenco

- Dr. Harold A. Mooney
- Dr. Peter H. Raven
- Dr. F. Sherwood Rowland
- Dr. George M. Woodwell

Signed by 2409 scientists as of June 11, 1997

h/t Tobis [12] vis Essunger. And I agree with Tobis that "climate disruption" is adequate — one need not add "global."

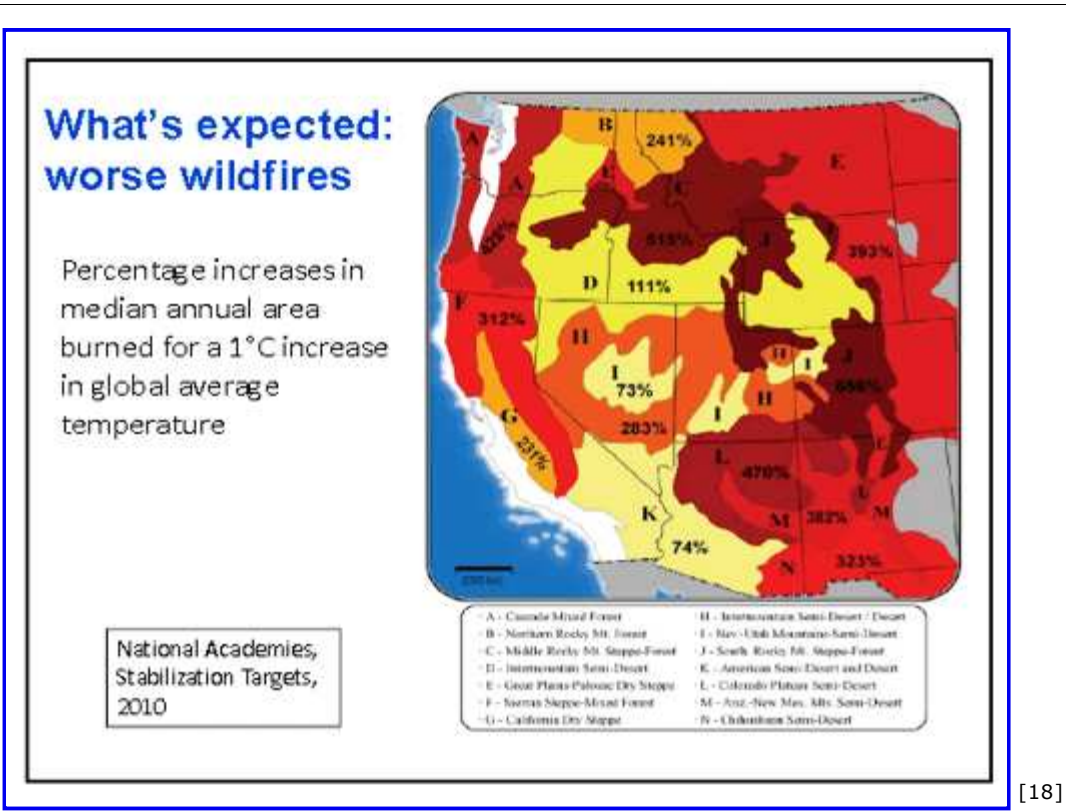
Now I don't actually think Holdren should spend time proposing different names for global warming in his capacity as White House science adviser, even if he has been doing so for over a decade. It just gives people an excuse to ignore the science and call it "controversial." That said, it would be nice if any of his critics actually looked at his terrific presentation. I am reposting a few of his PPTs.



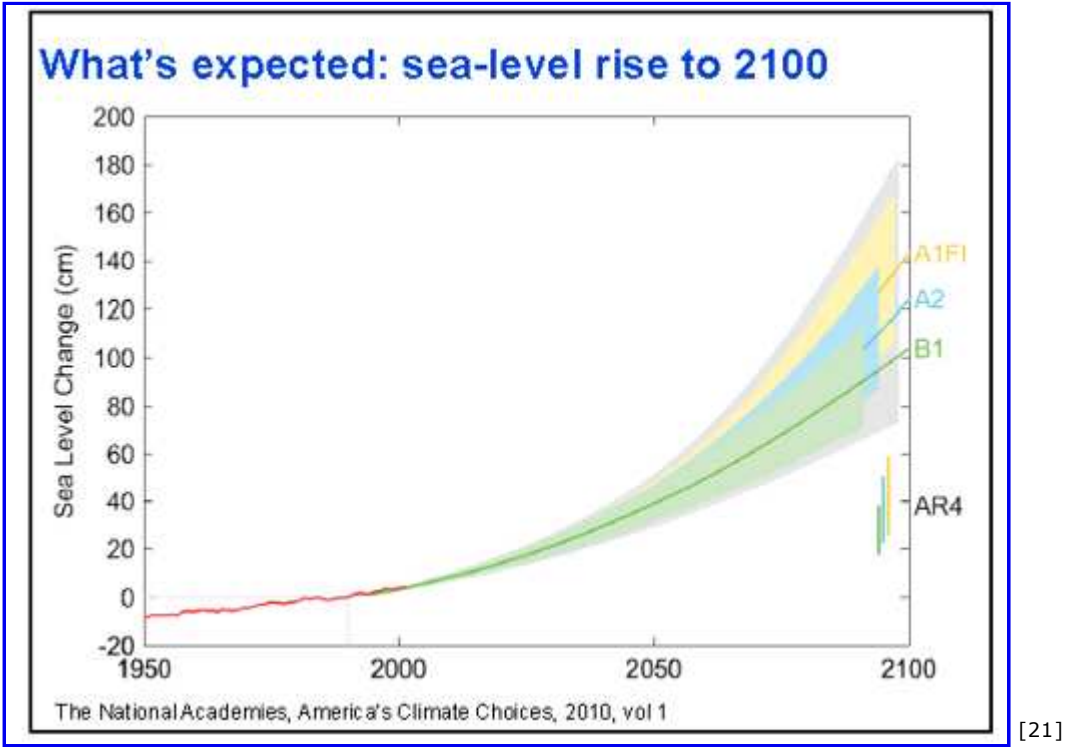
Scientists have been advocating for a new term for "global warming" for a long time. That's because slight changes in global average temperature can have drastic effects on local climates and ecosystems around the world, affecting billions of lives. The simple term "global warming" does not capture the very severe and uneven impacts that warming is already having on society.

"Global warming is in fact a dangerous misnomer," [Holdren said](#) [14], "because it implies something that is uniform across the planet, is mainly about temperature, is gradual, and indeed might even be good for you." He then went on to tell how "the phenomenon in question" is none of these things. It is "highly non-uniform, it's not just about temperature.... It is not gradual but rapid compared with the capacity of society to adjust ... [and] it's gonna be mostly bad and worse and worse going forward for more and more people."

Warmer average global temperatures mean more devastating storms like [Nashville's Katrina](#) [15], more floods like the devastating one that put one fifth of Pakistan under water, more [intense droughts and wildfires](#) [16] like the one that wiped out tens of thousands of homes in Russia and caused them to stop exporting wheat for the year, and long-term droughts like the on Australia has faced for more than a decade years (see [Absolute must read: Australia today offers horrific glimpse of U.S. Southwest, much of planet, post-2040, if we don't slash emissions soon](#) [17]).



Unrestricted emissions of greenhouse gases means a host of other interrelated problems from ocean acidification to species migration to the erosion and eventual submersion of coastal communities due to sea level rise (see [Geological Society: Acidifying oceans spell marine biological meltdown "by end of century"](#) [19] and [Sea levels may rise 3 times faster than IPCC estimated, could hit 6 feet by 2100](#) [20]).



Anyone who follows the science of climate change will agree that the term "global warming" is outdated, oversimplified, and gives only an incomplete picture of the multitude of ways in which a warmer world will disrupt not only the functioning of Earth's ecological life support systems, but also out economic, social, and geopolitical systems.

Despite the laughable conspiracy theorists [pouncing](#) ^[5] on Holdren's remarks — "Resorting to word engineering demonstrates a substantial lack of confidence in the effectiveness of hysteria advocacy" and "Sounds like somebody's starting to feel uncomfortable because the icecaps and Greenland ice sheets aren't melting fast enough" — the dire nature of the facts and analyses that he presents go far beyond simple "global warming."

That's why so many people have been recommending other terms for so long. James Gustav Speth, the former chair of the council on environmental quality under the Carter administration and founder of both the World Resources Institute and the National Resources Defense Council [used the term](#) ^[22] "global climate disruption" in an article as far back as 2005. Other examples of scientists using the term before the Obama administration include:

- The [organization of university presidents](#) ^[23] in 2007
- [Chuck Vest](#) ^[24], President of the National academy of engineering in 2008
- [Harvey V. Fineberg, president of the Institute for Medicine](#) ^[23] in 2008
- References in academic journals [like this one](#) ^[25] in 2009
- [Paul A.T. Higgins](#) ^[26] of the American Meteorological Society in a report for the American Association for the Advancement of Science earlier in 2010.

So fear not, conservative and center-right media. "Global climate disruption" is not some new White House brand name designed to trick people into the malevolent clean energy conspiracy. It is simply a more accurate way of describing the many catastrophic impacts that global warming will have on our society, environment and economy if we keep listening to the siren song of "do nothing" from your fellow anti-science disinformers.

As Shakespeare wrote in *Romeo and Juliet*:

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet...

Call it what you will, but that which we call global climate disruption by any other name will still drastically alter our way of life, cause irreversible damage to our climate, and harm the health and welfare of billions of people.

– *Joseph Romm, with assistance from CAP's Sean Pool*

Article printed from Climate Progress: <http://climateprogress.org>

URL to article: <http://climateprogress.org/2010/09/21/climate-disruption-caused-by-global-warming-driven-by-human-emissions-of-greenhouse-gases/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Image: <http://climateprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Holdren1.gif>

[2] Fox News: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/09/16/white-house-global-warming-global-climate-disruption/>

[3] presentation: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/jph-kavli-9-2010.pdf>

[4] center-right: <http://climateprogress.org/2010/08/04/atlantic-editor-clive-crook-fabricates-another-quote-to-smear-michael-mann/>

[5] Right Has Field Day With New 'Global Warming' Term: <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/opinions/view/opinion/Right-Has-Field-Day-With-New-Global-Warming-Term-5067>

[6] Is 'Global Weirding' here?: <http://climateprogress.org/2010/02/17/global-weirding-global-warming-climate-change-tom-friedman/>

[7] Hell and High Water: <http://climateprogress.org/2009/03/22/an-introduction-to-global-warming-impacts-hell-and-high-water/>

[8] Pakistan flooding story: <http://climateprogress.org/2010/09/12/juan-cole-media-great-pakistani-deluge-hell-and-high-water/>

[9] 2003 memo: <http://www.politicalstrategy.org/archives/001330.php>

[10] stop using the term "global warming": <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2003/mar/04/usnews.climatechange>

[11] Scientists' Statement: <http://www.whrc.org/resources/essays>

[/pdf/1997_climate_stmt.pdf](#)

[12] Tobis: **<http://initforthegold.blogspot.com/>**

[13] Image: **<http://climateprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Holdren2.gif>**

[14] Holdren said: **<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/75296>**

[15] Nashville's Katrina: **<http://climateprogress.org/2010/05/22/the-tennessee-deluge-of-2010-nashvilles-katrina-and-the-dawn-of-the-superflood/>**

[16] intense droughts and wildfires: **<http://climateprogress.org/2010/08/15/new-york-times-front-page-story-in-weather-chaos-a-case-for-global-warming/>**

[17] Absolute must read: Australia today offers horrific glimpse of U.S. Southwest, much of planet, post-2040, if we don't slash emissions soon: **<http://climateprogress.org/2009/04/12/australia-southwest-global-warming-drought-wildfire/>**

[18] Image: **<http://climateprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Holdren3.gif>**

[19] Geological Society: Acidifying oceans spell marine biological meltdown "by end of century": **<http://climateprogress.org/2010/08/31/geological-society-acid-ocean-marine-lif/>**

[20] Sea levels may rise 3 times faster than IPCC estimated, could hit 6 feet by 2100:

<http://climateprogress.org/2009/12/09/sea-level-rise-six-feet-three-times-faster-than-the-ipcc-estimat/>

[21] Image: **<http://climateprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Holdren41.gif>**

[22] used the term: **<http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5009846794>**

[23] organization of university presidents: **<http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=10132008f>**

[24] Chuck Vest: **<http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=10072008>**

[25] like this one: **<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0006825>**

[26] Paul A.T. Higgins: **<http://www.aas.org/spp/rd/rdreport2010/ch15.pdf>**

Copyright © 2009 Climate Progress. All rights reserved.