

NYT: Global warming halted because... we're lucky

By: Michael Bastasch – June 11, 2013

The New York Times has attempted to explain the slowdown in global warming over the last fifteen years. Their answer: We're just lucky.

“As unlikely as this may sound, we have lucked out in recent years when it comes to global warming,” writes the NYT's Justin Gillis.

“The slowdown is a bit of a mystery to climate scientists,” Gillis continues. “True, the basic theory that predicts a warming of the planet in response to human emissions does not suggest that warming should be smooth and continuous. To the contrary, in a climate system still dominated by natural variability, there is every reason to think the warming will proceed in fits and starts.”

Despite the global temperature plateau, Gillis argues that global warming skeptics are still wrong to claim that global warming is not caused by carbon dioxide emissions. He suggests that maybe the ocean has absorbed some of the heat that would have otherwise been pumped into the atmosphere.

“We certainly cannot conclude, as some people want to, that carbon dioxide is not actually a greenhouse gas. More than a century of research thoroughly disproves that claim,” writes Gillis.

“So the real question is where all that heat is going, if not to warm the surface. And a prime suspect is the deep ocean,” Gillis continues. “Our measurements there are not good enough to confirm it absolutely, but a growing body of research suggests this may be an important part of the answer.”

Gillis also mentions that global warming plateaued from the 1950s to the 1970s, with much evidence suggesting that “sunlight-blocking pollution from dirty factories may have play a role.”

“Today, factory pollution from China and other developing countries could be playing a similar role in blocking some sunlight,” Gillis writes. “We will not know for sure until we send up satellites that can make better measurements of particles in the air.”

For the past 15 years there has been a lull in rising global temperatures which has many climate scientists scrambling to find an explanation and global warming skeptics arguing that the dire predictions made by activists are full of hot air.

“The divergence of the real world observations from the multi-decadal climate predictions, both in terms of forecasting the magnitude of global warming and of changes in regional climate, is finally initiating a much overdue scientific debate on the level of our knowledge of the climate system,” said Roger Pielke, Sr., Senior Research Scientist at CIRES at the University of Colorado at Boulder. “While there is no doubt that humans are altering the climate system, it is in a diverse variety of ways besides that caused by adding greenhouse gases such as CO₂.”

The UN’s climate authority has predicted that global temperatures will rise between 1 degree Celsius and 3 degrees Celsius in the short term. Yet the lack of warming since 1998 has scientists ratcheting down estimates of global temperature rises.

Researchers from the UK recently reported that global temperatures will only rise between 0.9 degrees Celsius and 2.0 degrees Celsius. Before that, Norwegian researchers found that the earth may warm only 1.9 degrees Celsius.

“The most extreme projections are looking less likely than before,” Dr. Alexander Otto of the University of Oxford told BBC News.

In fact, Patrick Michaels of the libertarian Cato Institute compiled a partial list of studies that have lowered their warming estimates:

“Richard Lindzen gives a range of 0.6 to 1.0 C (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Atmospheric Sciences*, 2011); Andreas Schmittner, 1.4 to 2.8 C (*Science*, 2011); James Annan, using two techniques, 1.2 to 3.6 C and 1.3 to 4.2 C (*Climatic Change*, 2011); J.H. van Hateren, 1.5 to 2.5 C (*Climate*

Dynamics, 2012); Michael Ring, 1.5 to 2.0 C (Atmospheric and Climate Sciences, 2012); and Julia Hargreaves, including cooling from dust, 0.2 to 4.0 C and 0.8 to 3.6 C (Geophysical Research Letters, 2012).”

“So, if past is prologue, this current plateau will end at some point, too, and a new era of rapid global warming will begin,” concludes Gillis. “That will put extra energy and moisture into the atmosphere that can fuel weather extremes, like heat waves and torrential rains. We might one day find ourselves looking back on the crazy weather of the 2010s with a deep yearning for those halcyon days.”