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For Al Gore, The Lack Of Any Increase In Hurricanes Related To Global Warming Is An Inconvenient Truth

By Patrick Michael - 11/4/2012

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A recent study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) purports to show an increase in hurricane-related storm surges that conveniently begins in 1923, which was during a decade-long lull in hurricane activity. Starting something at a low point pretty much insures a trend in any randomly distributed variable. This problem was noted by the above-mentioned Tom Knutson.

But the real killer to the hurricane-global warming hype comes from Dr. Ryan Maue (pronounced like the island) of Weatherbell Analytics. Using satellite data that gives global coverage beginning in 1972, Maue has calculated what is called the “Accumulated Cyclone Energy” (ACE) index. This is a mathematical integration of storm wind speed and longevity. There obviously is no change in

hurricane energy that at all relates to warming, and it is currently near its lowest levels on record.

I trotted this out once in a discussion with Nick Kristof on CNN's Piers Morgan show on November 1. CNN, of course, cannot let go of the meme that Sandy (which was not a hurricane at landfall) was amped by global warming, so Kristof's substantive response was to accuse me of not publishing any scientific papers since 1992. (I emailed him the 8-page single spaced list beginning in 1992, presuming he will set the record straight with CNN—and also rag on whomever gave him that little bit of libel.). Morgan's producer also had copies of the papers dealing specifically with oceanic temperatures, climate change, and hurricane intensity.

What is really modulating Atlantic hurricanes is the distribution of temperature in the Atlantic. It was in an unfavorable mode in the 70s and 80s, which reversed in the mid-90s, concurrent with the start of a ten-year very active period. Since the big storm outbreak in 2005, the Atlantic hasn't been unusually energetic since then. In fact, we are now enjoying the longest interval in the modern record (seven years and counting) without a major (Category 3) hurricane strike in the U.S.

The bottom line is that, everything else being equal, warmer oceans should produce stronger or more frequent storms. But the change has clearly been so small that there is simply no detectable signal—and is likely to remain so for a long time. Further, everything else is almost never equal. It would have been nice if Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Cuomo had done a bit of fact-checking before stirring the global warming pot. As for Gore, the lack of any increase in hurricane energy related to global warming is just an inconvenient truth.