

THE ADVOCATE

Guest commentary: FEMA asks Louisiana to do the impossible — or else

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Last fall, the Federal Emergency Management Agency issued a draft proposal that will require Louisiana to do the impossible or face the loss of disaster relief funds. Specifically, state governments will be required to assess the risk of future disasters in a changing climate.

FEMA has solicited public comments and will, as per usual, ignore most if not all of them when it issues its final rulemaking later this year.

So what can Louisiana confidently expect global warming to do to its most significant natural hazard, hurricanes?

Southeastern Louisiana is one of the most hurricane-prone locations in the nation, with an average of one every seven years — and they can be strong. In 1969, Hurricane Camille, one of three Category 5 storms to strike the US in the post-1860 record, made its first landfall in Plaquemines Parish. In 1957, Category 4 Audrey devastated Lake Charles with very little warning. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy caused major loss of life and flooding in New Orleans, and 2005's massive Hurricane Katrina was the deadliest storm since the Lake Okeechobee hurricane of 1928.

These climatological facts are not going to change due to the slight changes in surface temperature that may be associated with human emissions of carbon dioxide.

Nonetheless, FEMA will require states to “provide a summary of the probability of future hazard events that includes projected changes in occurrence for each natural hazard in terms of location, extent, intensity, frequency, and/or duration. Probability must include ... the effects of climate change on the identified hazards.”

Let's be blunt: FEMA hasn't a clue about climate change, probably because they read the reports coming out from the federal climatologists. For example, the federal government's “National Assessment” of climate change says mental illness increases as it gets warmer. Do folks really believe that people in Tallahassee, which is cooler than Miami, are also saner?

Anything one can say about climate change and future hazards, such as hurricanes, has to be based upon some kind of forecast model, and there are a lot out there. For example, in its most recent compendium on climate change, the United Nations uses 107 different versions, all of

which predict slightly different futures and none of which have been correct about the climate of the past two decades.

In those past two decades, according to the global satellite-sensed temperature record environmentalists used to love, there has been no net global surface warming whatsoever. Is it realistic to think we could use these same models to reliably predict how many hurricanes will hit Louisiana in 2050?

It simply can't be done. Not only have these models failed to accurately predict global temperatures, but tornadoes are too small to be captured by them.

One important component of hurricane-related damage is sea level. However, predicted rises are directly proportional to global surface temperature, so if the models are predicting too much warming, they are doing the same for the rise in sea level.

The relationship between hurricanes and global warming is also not very clear. Since satellite coverage became global around 1970, we can track every last one of them, including the many that stay harmlessly out to sea, and we can estimate their power from the way they look from space. In the nearly half-century of data we now have, there is simply no relationship between the frequency and/or power of these storms and global surface temperature.

The average length of time between Category 3 hurricanes that hit the U.S. is a little over 2 years. The last one we had was almost 10 years ago. We haven't had that big a gap since the Civil War era, even though it is a degree warmer now.

As for the future, some computer models are forecasting slight — but statistically significant — increases in hurricane wind speed or rainfall around 2080, while other simulations forecast a reduction in the frequency of storms that make landfall in the U.S.

FEMA expects Louisiana to magically know which of these is right, and how climate change will effect the “intensity, frequency, and/or duration” of not just hurricanes, but only those hurricanes that visit their wrath upon the state, as well as monster tornadoes — or else they might withhold the tax dollars paid to them in case of emergency. It seems as though FEMA's morals are as bad as their grasp of climate science.

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