

FEMA is asking Mississippi to do the impossible ... or lose disaster aid

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Last fall, the Federal Emergency Management Agency issued a draft proposal that would require Mississippi 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 Mississippi confidently expect global warming to do to its most significant natural hazard, the tropical cyclone?

A peculiar geography

Mississippi's peculiar geography makes it home to some of the most violent weather on earth, in wide variety. It is subject to a combination of frequent hurricanes, some of which are historic, and, along with Alabama, a percent of total tornadoes that are F3 or higher ("severe" or worse) that is as high as it gets in the country.

Hurricane Camille, which came ashore between Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis in 1969, remains the most intense hurricane to ever strike the U.S., owing to its exceedingly low barometric pressure at landfall (26.72 inches) and eyewall winds in the 190 mph range.

Despite its small size, Camille set a national record for a hurricane storm surge, at 22 feet. The very different Hurricane Katrina (2005), while centered on the Mississippi-Louisiana border as a Category 3 storm, had a marginally higher pressure at its third (Mississippi) landfall, 27.37. But Katrina was massive, and it generated a storm surge of up to 27 feet.

The propensity for extreme tornadoes that is characteristic on inland areas in the Deep South, was evident with the 1936 Category 5 Tupelo tornado, responsible for at least 216 deaths.

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 Mississippi 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."

FEMA hasn't a clue

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 Jackson, which is cooler than Pascagoula, 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 last 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 tornados will hit Mississippi 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.

Simply no relationship

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 ten 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 Mississippi 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 tornados -- 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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