

# Hottest July on record signals accelerated climate change

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This past month, July 2019, marked the warmest month ever recorded, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Programme of the European Union. Globally, the temperature was 0.56 degrees Celsius higher than the average for 1981 to 2010, and slightly exceeded the previous monthly high reached in July 2016. The record heat was widespread, reaching across North America, Europe, Siberia, central Asia, Iran, and Antarctica.

This is not a temporary aberration. The last four years, 2015-2018, have been the hottest on record. If current trends continue, 2019 is likely to be the second hottest year after 2016. According to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), every month since May 2015 has been more than 1 degree Celsius hotter than average.

Petteri Taalas, secretary-general of the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO), stated, "July has re-written climate history, with dozens of new temperature records at local, national and global level." He went on, "This is not science fiction. It is the reality of climate change. It is happening now and it will worsen in the future without urgent climate action."

Of especial significance is that global temperature has nearly reached 1.2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels—approaching the 1.5 degree mark which scientists warn represents a "tipping point" when catastrophic and perhaps irreversible changes to the climate will begin. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, on its current trajectory the world is likely to reach that point by 2030.

The cause of this warming is not in dispute among the overwhelming majority of scientists. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded in its Fifth Assessment Report (2014) that there is a 95

percent probability that human activities—principally the emissions of greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide—are driving the increasing temperature. Industrial activities over the last 150 years have raised atmospheric carbon dioxide levels from 280 parts per million to 400 parts per million.

The Swiss National Centre for Climate Services predicts that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, average summer temperatures may be up to 8 degrees Fahrenheit (4.5 degrees Celsius) higher by the middle of this century.

The unprecedented heat was felt in many places around the world. In Europe, this summer's heat wave not only broke records, but shattered them. In Paris, for example, the temperature reached 42.6 Celsius (108.7 Fahrenheit), beating the previous record for the city of 40.4 degrees, set more than 70 years ago. Some places in Western and Central Europe experienced daily averages of 18 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius) above normal.

The consequences of global warming are manifested in a myriad of ways. Worldwide, glaciers are melting at a rate faster than predicted less than a decade ago. Fluctuations in the rates of melting will have significant effects on the millions of people around the world regarding flooding, drinking water, and irrigation.

This year, the melting of the Greenland ice sheet, second largest in the world after that of Antarctica, may reach or exceed the volume lost in 2012, the highest recorded so far. According to the UN World Meteorological Organization, 160 billion tons of ice have been lost in July alone. This huge influx of freshwater into the North Atlantic is likely to have significant impact on the Gulf Stream which, in turn, will alter weather patterns in eastern North America

and Western Europe.

Wildfires are breaking out across the Arctic at an unprecedented rate. More than 100 have so far this year been reported in Greenland, Siberia, and Alaska. These fires emit huge amounts of carbon dioxide from burning vegetation—an estimated 100 megatons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere between June 1 and July 21, according to the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS), thus making a significant contribution to greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, accelerating global warming even further.

The dire consequences of global warming to the lives of billions of people around the world in the coming decades are highlighted in just-released reports by the United Nations and the World Resources Institute. Over 3 billion people face extreme shortages of food and water in the immediate future unless drastic measures are undertaken. As the heating of the world continues, extreme weather events (hurricanes, droughts, wildfires), sea level rise, mass extinctions, ecosystem degradation, and other environmental disruptions will intensify and spread across growing portions of the planet. Population movements of climate refugees will occur on a scale that will dwarf the current migrant/refugee crises.

The climate crisis is part of the overall crisis of capitalism, which poses an existential threat to humanity. Whether from environmental collapse or nuclear holocaust, or both, the continued existence of human beings and, indeed, most other forms of life on earth are under imminent threat of extinction. Both of these dangers flow inevitably from the contradictions of capitalism—the most fundamental of these being the globalized nature of the economy versus the division of the world into rival nation states. Not only is inter-imperialist competition for global domination leading inexorably toward world war, but this same rivalry also renders impossible the kind of scientifically planned, globally coordinated effort necessary if the processes driving climate change are to be halted and reversed.

The feeble efforts so far attempted under capitalism to address the climate crises have been completely ineffective, as clearly demonstrated by the accelerating rate of global warming. For several decades now, the scientific community has raised increasingly urgent warnings that fundamental measures to address climate change must be immediately undertaken if catastrophe

is to be avoided. And yet, nothing is done because the right of the major corporations to maximize profit must not be abridged. Current proposals, such as the Green New Deal in the US, pale into insignificance compared to the scale of the necessary task, because they accept the framework of capitalism and the private ownership of the means of production.

The technical means exist to address the climate crisis. Seventy percent of all greenhouse gas emissions originate from just 100 companies. However, in order to effectively implement these solutions, control of the world economy must be taken away from the tiny minority of capitalists and put into the hands of the working class to build a socialist society on an international basis for the benefit of all.



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