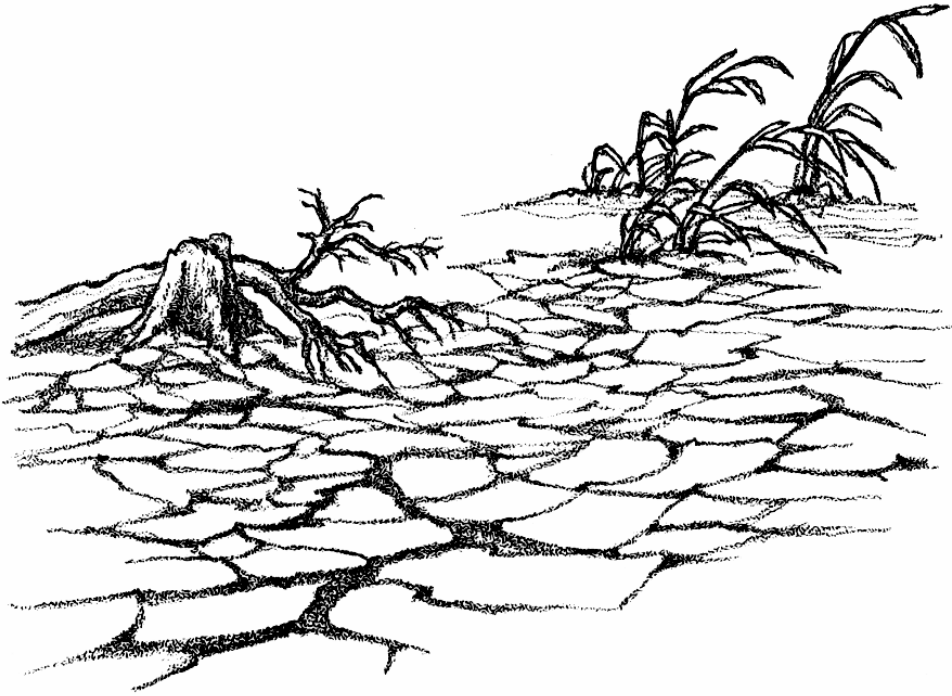


The Effects of Global Warming

by Kenn Oberrecht



Global warming during the past century has been so gradual as to be nearly imperceptible. Neither does it adhere to a regular schedule or predictable pattern, which perhaps explains why doubters and nay-sayers still dispute the whole

idea. Their ranks are shrinking, however, in the face of a growing body of evidence.

Experts now tell us that if we do nothing to reduce the release of heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere, we can expect temperatures to rise during the next century from 2.7 to 8.1 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 to 4.5 degrees C.). Even these increases seem small and no cause for alarm, particularly here on the coast where ocean breezes usually temper even the hottest days.

While many of us might think first of the discomfort, inconvenience, and expense we would have to bear as the planet's climate warms, the greatest effects are likely to be far more catastrophic.

The problem, remember, is global warming; the operative word here is global. The increases will be in average temperatures, and even then we'll still probably experience cool spells, cold snaps, and years that aren't as hot as we might expect. With rising average temperatures, however, come increases in the probability of warmer days and more of them.

For example, studies indicate that temperate-zone cities now recording maximum temperatures exceeding 90 degrees Fahrenheit 35 days a year

will, by the year 2020, swelter under such heat for an additional 50 days a year.

While many of us might think first of the discomfort, inconvenience, and expense we would have to bear as the planet's climate warms, the greatest effects are likely to be far more catastrophic. They include the dieback of forests; severe drought, possibly leading to crop failures and famine; and a rise in sea levels, which could greatly alter our coastlines, not to mention our lifestyles.

We can't solve these problems overnight. In fact, even if we were able to immediately take the most drastic measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, it would take several decades to check the progress of global warming.

We have already done a great deal of irreversible damage to our atmosphere since pre-industrial days. For example, we expect chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and related atmospheric greenhouse gases to have doubled by the year 2050. Without dramatic measures to decrease emissions worldwide, the consequences could be dire.

Although developing nations now contribute about 30 percent of the global carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, scientists estimate that their dense populations and industrialization will increase that amount to more than 50 percent by the year 2025.

The United States and other industrialized nations have been part of the problem for too long. If we are to persuade developing nations to clean up their acts, we must become part of the solution.

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So some continued warming is inevitable. Most scientists agree that one certain result will be a rise in the world's sea level. In fact, that process is already underway.

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