

Global warming-fact or fiction assignment



Global Warming – Fact or Fiction? – Speech The Earth is rapidly heating up or is it? If it is, the next few decades may witness Biblical scenes of rising temperatures, crop failures, flooding and the extinction of different species. On the other hand, increases of Carbon Dioxide in our atmosphere may well encourage plants and trees to thrive like never before. Whom can you believe? One thing is certain the debate on climate change and Global Warming is heating up. It is surely right for us to take the concerns seriously even if we cannot yet be sure of the truth.

Climate change on our planet is nothing new. As far as we can make out, it has been going on for millions of years. Our world is different to the world inhabited by the dinosaurs when CO₂ levels were estimated to be five times the level they are at today. Our world is different to the world of the ice age, when temperatures plummeted and the world froze. The debate on global warming, though, has been grabbing the headlines recently. Those who have led the debate range from the hothouse extremists to the purely cynical disbelievers.

Their arguments have left the world wondering quite what to believe. One thing is definite; there is no shortage of “hot gas”. Today’s debate focuses on the last century; the first for which reliable figures are available. References are often made to the climate fluctuations of the last few centuries. In these fluctuations we have recorded grapes grown in places we would not have thought possible today. We also have evidence for so called ‘mini ice ages’ when the world seemed to cool down for years. Is it possible to make sense of the arguments and evidence?

Can we come to some sort of conclusion about exactly where we are heading? We are already spending five billion dollars a year on seeking the cause of climate change. The panic evident in the media and many governments world wide means that economic policy and even the wealth of nations may be at stake. It is vital we get the reality into perspective. Let's start with one fact upon which most experts agree. In our burning of fossil fuels, industrialization and day to day activities, mankind is emitting massive amounts of Carbon Dioxide and other heat-trapping or 'greenhouse' gases.

Principally, the debate about greenhouse gases refers to the large amounts of CO₂ we are producing. There we already have a major disagreement.

While some scientists claim that CO₂ is a major greenhouse gas, others state that it dwarfed in comparison by the largest greenhouse gas, water vapour.

Some scientists claim that there is a 25% increase in the amount of CO₂ compared to 250 years ago. Yet recent studies on tree leaves that are nearly 10, 000 years old show that the levels of CO₂ in our atmosphere were roughly the same then as they are today.

Some scientists state that the temperatures in the previous century have on average risen by 0. 5%. Initially this rise indicates that the world is indeed getting warmer. A closer look at the figures show that the most of this rise was in fact before 1940. At this time the amount of man made CO₂ in the atmosphere was negligible. In fact temperatures between 1940 and the 1970 began to fall. This prompted self-appointed experts in the middle of that decade to predict that we were on the verge of another ice age. More importantly, these decades saw 75% of man made CO₂ released into the atmosphere.

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This must surely challenge the view that man made CO2 emissions are related to climate change. Recent studies too have begun to show a direct correlation in the temperature of the Earth to activity on the surface of the sun. Today the emphasis is on the apparent tide of rising temperatures. This, we are told by some, is melting the polar ice-caps. This will in turn raise sea levels and flood many areas of our planet. Incidentally there is no doubt about the capability of the ice to achieve this. Antarctica alone contains enough water in the form of ice to raise seas levels by twenty feet.

A warmer atmosphere may also bring us more intense rainfall, floods and droughts, heatwaves and tropical diseases. A warmer atmosphere may exacerbate food shortages; pose a threat to water supplies and soil stability. How do we know this? Well the truth is we don't for sure. We suspect it. We have devised computer-generated models to estimate what the probable effects of global warming will be. The trouble with estimates and models is they tend to be inaccurate and sometimes have been proved plainly wrong. Even

NASA, who claim to have an almost accurate predictor, allow that nobody can possibly know what the side effects and changes will be. It can only ever be a possibility. Studies can show just as effectively that temperatures on the ice-caps are constant and evening some cases dropping. Besides this there is ample evidence to show that the poles were once fertile lands. The fact is our planet has always changed and fluctuations in temperature have always happened. Despite the fears of our warming to extinction, we have not even yet reached the high temperatures experienced in the 12th century.

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Yet this possibility is causing great concern. It has generated a host of individuals and industries worried by the scenario of a world that seems a degree or two away from virtual annihilation. The bruising sweep of El Nino, a regular occurrence of disturbed weather patterns on our planet, aided the alarm. Hurricanes, storms, volcanoes, record temperatures seemed to back up the possibility. We are told we are heating our planet up to such an extent that pretty soon there will be little left with which we are familiar. The fact is that there have been many hot and disturbed spells in our planet's history.

There have been stronger hurricanes, higher temperatures, wetter rainfalls and more destructive El Ninos. Still the media is full of dire predictions and warnings. Governments around the world seem to fall over themselves to sign the Kyoto treaty on the limiting of Greenhouse gas emissions. There are however a few voices to be heard amidst the cry of " build the ark". They wonder whether the doom scenario based on a computer prediction isn't a little unfair. There are actually many thousands of eminent scientists who read the ' evidence' another way.

They do not even agree that the planet seems to be slightly warmer. It depends, they say, on where you measure the temperature. Some readings can be interpreted as registering hardly any change at all. To date the US has pulled out of the Kyoto agreement. The evidence they say is too conflicting for the measures proposed. Besides this the measures proposed will do very little if anything to affect climate change and will bring nothing but economic hardship. Despite the outcry of environmentalists, the US's preferred focus on new technology and growth may yet turn out to make perfect sense.

Our planet will get warmer and colder. That is simply a fact and there is not one thing we can do that will alter it. Other researchers pointed out the inaccuracies of CO₂ estimates. They said that that the US may not be a net producer of CO₂ after all. It may well be that the forests, soils and wetlands of the North America are absorbing more CO₂ than the US and Canada are producing. Even if the increase in CO₂ levels are as steep as predicted, the effects it seems may not be all that bad. CO₂ is regularly pumped into greenhouses for one reason. It helps plants grow.

In fact plants given much higher levels of CO₂ were on average 40% larger and more bountiful than others. They were also more able to withstand extreme weather conditions. Who are we to believe? That is perhaps the most difficult question put to us today. Are we to be worried by the doom scenario of the world as a wild, raging tempestuous flooded greenhouse? Or are we perhaps to be relieved that the extreme effects are nothing more than the natural fluctuations experienced by the world for millions of years? Surely until we can know for sure, it is better that we prepare ourselves as best as we can.

Climate change whatever the cause, is a reality. One thing is certain; there are more of us on this planet than ever before. We are living in a highly industrialised age. If the climate is indeed changing, we are not in the position to simply 'up sticks' and move somewhere else. Climate change, whether man-made or natural, is a cause for concern and protection. The debate will no doubt continue. Perhaps there will be something positive to come out of all the "hot gas". At least we are becoming more aware of the effects of our lives and actions on the planet.

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That can only be a good thing. Ignoring the debate and burying our heads in the sand, will solve nothing. Eternal vigilance, awareness and even argument may well turn out to be our saving graces. Let make sure though that our research and preparation are focused where they will do some good. Sources used in this speech and related information Global Warming Information Page <http://www.globalwarming.org/> Man Made Global Warming - Debunking News and Links <http://www.sitewave.net/news/> The Global Warming Information Centre <http://www.nationalcenter.org/Kyoto.html>