



Union of Concerned Scientists

Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

UCS FACTCHECK

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CONTRARIANS MISUING STATEMENT FROM PHIL JONES ABOUT GLOBAL TEMPERATURE OVER THE PAST 14 YEARS TO BOLSTER ANTI-SCIENCE CLAIMS

BRITAIN'S DAILY MAILGROSSLY MISREPRESENTS A SCIENTIST'S WORDS, AGAIN

Climate science contrarians are twisting the words of Phil Jones, a climate scientist at the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit, from a British Broadcasting Corporation interview. When asked, "Do you agree that from 1995 to the present there has been no statistically-significant global warming?" Jones answered, "Yes, but only just. I also calculated the trend for the period 1995 to 2009. This trend (0.12C per decade) is positive, but not significant at the 95 percent significance level. The positive trend is quite close to the significance level. Achieving statistical significance in scientific terms is much more likely for longer periods, and much less likely for shorter periods."

Contrarians claim that Jones was saying the Earth is not warming. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jones is simply answering a very narrow question about how much temperatures have increased during the past 14 years and only the past 14 years. During this very short time period, human-induced warming has caused the planet to remain quite hot compared to its average for the past century. But with only 14 years worth of data, it is hard to achieve a high level of significance in any trend. By contrast, data collected over the past 100-plus years show an unmistakable warming trend. As Jones says later in the interview, "I'm 100 percent confident that the climate has warmed." On the question of whether or not humans are contributing to that warming, Jones says, "I would go along with [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] Chapter 9 - there's evidence that most of the warming since the 1950s is due to human activity."

The source of this recent misrepresentation seems to be a Daily Mail article. Previously, the Daily Mail misrepresented the work of meteorologist Mojib Latif to falsely claim the Earth was going to cool.

Climate contrarians do not have good scientific arguments or data on which to base their claims. The real "significant trend" here is that they often resort to twisting the words of scientists to make their points.



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According to a backgrounder on global temperatures from the Union of Concerned Scientists, “Over the last century, global average temperature has increased by more than 1°F (0.6°C). While the record shows significant regional differences in warming, the long-term global upward trend is unambiguous.”

It continues, “Over the last 25 years, Earth’s global average temperature has been increasing at more than twice the rate of the last century. In fact, nine of the warmest years on record have occurred in just the last 10 years. This warming has been accompanied by a decrease in very cold days and nights and an increase in extremely hot days and warm nights. Additionally, the oceans reached their highest recorded temperature in the summer of 2009. Oceans have absorbed much more heat from global warming than the air at the Earth’s surface because water is much better at retaining heat.”

The past decade was the hottest on record. Still, scientists are looking into the role that short-term ocean cycles, sunspot cycle and other factors can play in dampening the pace of warming over the past 10 years.

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The Union of Concerned Scientists is the leading U.S. science-based nonprofit organization working for a healthy environment and a safer world. Founded in 1969, UCS is headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and also has offices in Berkeley, Chicago and Washington, D.C.