



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Politics](#).

Expert: Health risks rise as Earth warms

CDC director says there's no question about climate change's negative impact

By David Whitney - dwhitney@mcclatchydc.com

Published 12:00 am PDT Wednesday, October 24, 2007

WASHINGTON – From algae blooms in the Chesapeake Bay to heat waves, drought and fires consuming the West, global warming is stirring up health problems that are likely to worsen, witnesses told a Senate committee Tuesday.

They pointed to as many as 35,000 deaths in 2003 during a summer heat wave in Europe. They cited the spread of the West Nile virus, unseen in the United States eight years ago, to 47 states.

It's not a question of whether there will be health impacts from global warming, said Julie L. Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "It's a question of who, where, when and how," she said.

The testimony came during the 19th hearing this year on global warming held by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Next week the committee's global warming panel begins work on legislation introduced by Sens. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., and John Warner, R-Va., to cut emissions by 60 percent by 2050.

The legislation would allow states such as California to move ahead with even tougher laws. California has been fighting the Bush administration over its groundbreaking law and is expected to file a lawsuit next week against the Environmental Protection Agency for delays in issuing a waiver it needs to impose limits on car and truck emissions.

The Senate committee's chairwoman, California Democrat Barbara Boxer, cited the raging fires in Southern California as the kind of effects likely to multiply if Congress doesn't act soon to cut carbon dioxide emissions that are believed to be a cause of rising temperatures and extreme weather conditions.

Gerberding referred to a Centers for Disease Control chart showing that rising temperatures are likely to affect public health because of heat waves, severe weather, rising air pollution, waterborne diseases, water and food supply disruptions and even refugees resulting from civil conflict.

The chart foretold increasing rates of asthma and cardiovascular diseases, malaria, dengue, malnutrition, migration and premature death. During the 2003 heat wave, the CDC chart showed, 14,802 died just in France.

Boxer focused on the death last month of a 14-year-old boy after his brain was attacked by a rare amoeba he picked up while swimming in Lake Havasu in Arizona. The amoeba thrives in warm water, and Boxer said "we are beginning to see what happens when the water warms."

Gerberding said that more needs to be learned about the fatality, but she acknowledged that the emergence of such rare events "is exactly what we are here to talk about."

As in virtually every other hearing Boxer has held, Tuesday's focus on health problems from global warming

brought strong retorts from the panel's senior Republican, Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma.

Inhofe charged that the concern over health and global warming "has fallen prey to politics." He focused particularly on malaria, saying the mosquito-borne disease also can spread when it's cold. He suggested that the best way to eradicate it was through the use of dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane against mosquitoes. DDT was banned worldwide more than three decades ago because of its harm to wildlife.

Inhofe said concerns then "did not support a ban" on the pesticide. "Let us not repeat history again," he said.

But Susan R. Cooper, the commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Health and speaking for the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, said global warming "has the potential to place unprecedented demands on public health infrastructure."

Cooper said temperatures in drought-plagued Tennessee remained above 100 degrees for 11 days this summer, causing 15 heat-related deaths. The algae bloom in the Chesapeake resulted in a major fish kill this summer.

"States continually and effectively respond to weather and climate related events but the systems are being taxed as these types of events appear to occur with increased frequency and with greater severity," she said.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright](#) © [The Sacramento Bee](#)