

MAUNA LOA OBSERVATORY, Hawaii (AP) — The readings at this 2-mile-high station show a troubling upward curve as the world counts down to crucial climate talks: Global warming gases are building in the atmosphere at record levels from emissions that match scientists' worst-case scenarios.

Carbon dioxide concentrations this fall are hovering at around 385 parts per million, on their way to a near-certain record high above 390 in the first half of next year, at the annual peak.

"For the past million years we've never seen 390. You have to wonder what that's going to do," said physicist John Barnes, the observatory director.

One leading atmospheric scientist, Stephen Schneider, sees "coin-flip odds for serious outcomes for our planet."

Far from this mid-Pacific government observatory, negotiators from 192 nations gather in wintry Copenhagen, Denmark, next month to try to agree on steps to head off the worst of the climate disruptions researchers say will result if concentrations hit around 450 parts per million — in 30 years at the current rate. Some say the world has already passed a danger point, at 350 ppm, and must roll back.

Today's emissions curve is tracking the worst case among seven emissions scenarios set out in 2001 by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), British climatologists reported in September.

The UN expert group projects that such a path would raise global temperatures between 2.4 and 6.4 degrees Celsius (4.3 and 11.5 degrees F) by century's end. That would come on top of a global temperature increase of about 0.6 degrees Celsius (1 degree Fahrenheit)

CO2 curve ticks upward as key climate talks loom



in the past century, a warming trend the authoritative IPCC says is mainly due to the buildup of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Such warming will shift climate patterns, cause more extreme weather events, spread drought and floods to new areas, kill off plant and animal species, and cause seas to rise from heat expansion and the melting of land ice, the IPCC says.

"Changing several degrees may not seem like much, but we're just changing things too fast," Barnes said. "So the consequences could well be drastic."

The IPCC has urged industrialized countries to reduce global emissions by 25 to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. As of 2007, they stood only 4 percent below 1990 levels, and the rest of the world continued pouring out

more and more heat-trapping gases, chiefly from the burning of coal, gasoline and other fossil fuels.

Through this decade global emissions have grown by 23 percent. In 2008, almost three-quarters of the increase came from China, researchers reported last week. Other big contributors among developing countries were India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, Indonesia,

Iran and Mexico. Experts see no sign of a slowdown.

It would "probably be at 390 (ppm) next year at Mauna Loa," said Fred T. Mackenzie, a professor emeritus of oceanography at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. That would represent almost a 40-percent increase in carbon-dioxide density in the atmosphere since before the industrial age and extensive use of fossil fuels. Schneider, a Stanford University climatologist, said the world faces a huge risk.

"I think meters of sea-level rise are virtually inevitable, unless we can stop this. But I'm not such an optimist," he told journalists on a fellowship program with the Honolulu-based East-West Center. "The main message is we're in risk management. We do not know the science well enough to know exactly what the temperature is at when a tipping point will occur."

This U.S. government observatory, 11,141 feet up Mauna Loa's northern flank, also measures methane and other significant greenhouse gases. It was here on Hawaii's Big Island that climatologist Charles David Keeling pioneered the measurement of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, installing his experimental manometer on the gently sloping volcano in 1958.



Amazon improves Kindle battery, adds PDF support

Device's wireless-on life boosted to seven days on a charge, and PDF support obviates conversion to Kindle's native format.

There's almost no such thing as "enough" in the world of tech. But Amazon's Kindle e-reader, which can run for two weeks on a charge, surely has enough battery life. But the two-week figure only applies if you shut off the gizmo's 3G data connection. Leave it on, and you reduce the list to four days.

Until now: Amazon says that it's managed to improve wireless-on life to seven days on a charge, which surely counts as enough. It's also added native support for documents in PDF format. (Until now, you've had to convert PDFs to the Kindle's native format to read them.)

The best news: Existing owners of the current Kindle model will get both of these enhancements via an over-the-air software update. Owners of "some" earlier Kindles will get the PDF support, but not the extended battery life.

It may not be entirely coincidental that Amazon is making this announcement shortly before the arrival of Barnes & Noble's Nook. That imposing Kindle competitor has more features overall than Amazon's e-reader has had, including PDF support.

I don't see a figure for wireless-on battery life in B&N's specs list, but the Nook goes for ten days if you turn the wireless off. Which is still a heck of a lot longer than most electronic devices, but the device's color touchscreen presumably sucks enough power to reduce the life compared to that of the Kindle.

Both the Kindle and the Nook still have some features that the other one doesn't.

The Kindle, for instance, can read books out loud and has a crude Web browser; the Nook has Wi-Fi as well as 3G and lets you lend books to Nook-owning pals. I'm not going to come to any conclusions about whether there's a clear winner until the Nook shows up, but it's going to be fun to watch the two book megamerchants duke it out.

(Source: PC World)

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