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2017 was world's hottest year ever without El Nino, says Nasa

Henry Fountain and Jugal K Patell NYT News Service | Jan 19, 2018, 05:16 IST



Earth's long-term warming trend continued in 2017, government scientists reported on Thursday, with average surface temperatures only slightly below the record heat of the previous year. But unlike 2016, last year's warmth was not aided by [El Nino](#), the Pacific weather pattern that is usually linked to record-setting heat. Nasa ranked 2017 the second-

warmest year, after 2016.

Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who use a different analytical method, ranked it third, behind 2016 and 2015. Though 2015 was not technically an El Nino year, the phenomenon contributed to heat records that year and in 2016.

By both analyses, 17 of the 18 warmest years since modern record keeping began in 1880 have occurred since 2001. Overall, fueled by emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, temperatures have increased more than 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) since the late 19th century. In order to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, scientists say global temperatures must not increase more than 2 degrees Celsius.

"Individual ranking of years is not necessarily the most important thing," [Gavin A Schmidt](#), director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the Nasa group that conducted the analysis, said in an interview. "What we're seeing is an increasing string of years of temperatures more than 1 degree above the pre-industrial era. And we're not going to go back."

The warming trend continued as President Trump announced that US would withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate accord and repeal the Clean Power Plan, an Obama-era measure designed to reduce emissions from power plants.

But more than statements from politicians or data from scientists, events last year reminded the world that the climate is changing. Temperatures in the Arctic, warming about twice as fast as other parts of the planet, soared again during parts of 2017, and the region continued to lose sea ice and permafrost.

In other cases the links to climate change were not as conclusive, but a series of catastrophes seemed to indicate that such disasters were part of a new normal. Researchers had expected that 2017 would end a string of three consecutive years with record temperatures. That string was exacerbated by a strong El Nino that began in 2015 ended in the second half of 2016.

Normally, trade winds around the tropical Pacific blow from east to west, moving warmer water away from the South American coast and piling it up around Asia and Australia. In an El Nino those trade winds weaken or even reverse, allowing the typically colder parts of the ocean to warm. This extra heat at the ocean's surface releases energy into the atmosphere, increasing global temperatures.

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This is why, ordinarily, El Nino years tend to be the warmest years on record.

In a [La Nina](#) year, the oceanic pendulum tends to swing the other way, with the east-to-west winds becoming unusually strong, strengthening the process by which cold waters emerge from the ocean. That leads to cooler than normal ocean temperatures and cooler atmospheric temperatures. What we are witnessing is a weak La Nina.

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