Saved by Global Warming

David Suich, January 25, 2007

Of Course It Is Getting Warmer!

The earth is getting warmer, and why shouldn't it? For most of earth's 4.6 billion year history, the trend has been hot weather with no polar ice caps. Regular ice ages have only occurred in the last 50 million years, and we are presently in an ice age near its end.

Are we causing global warming? We are probably contributing to global warming, but we certainly are not the cause. There have been at least 17 regular ice ages during the last 2.5 million years. Our current ice age peaked around 20,000 years ago when approximately 30% of the earth's surface was covered with ice. It started getting warmer and glaciers began receding long before modern man began burning fossil fuels.

We Should Be Grateful for the Nice Weather

Based on ice cores from Greenland, scientists have determined that the earth lurches violently between periods of warmth and brutal cold. Luckily, human civilization has occurred in a time of unusually good weather.

Before our regular "mild" ice ages began, the ice ages that did occasionally occur were severe. Around 600 million years ago, the earth's surface froze in a super ice age know as the Cryogenian, or more commonly, Snowball Earth. The conditions were murderous. Ice covered the entire earth including the equator, and the oceans were frozen up to ½ mile thick. With average temperatures of -40°F, almost all life on the planet was wiped out.

Thank Goodness for Greenhouse Gases

Theoretically, the earth should have stayed frozen as the ice would have reflected light and heat from the sun, causing a vicious cycle of permanent cold weather. Luckily for us, volcanic activity spewed large quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, jumpstarting global warming and eventually melting the ice over the next 10 million years. Without greenhouse gases, we wouldn't be here.

No one really knows for certain why the earth's temperature changes so much. Some of the major factors that might contribute to changing global temperatures are carbon dioxide levels, continental drift, ocean currents, solar activity, and the tilt of the earth.

Say Goodbye to Mother Earth

So what's next? In the short term, it is likely we will have more cycles of ice ages and warming. But in the long term, the forecast is blistering heat followed by a permanent freeze. In approximately 5 billion years when the sun's supply of hydrogen becomes exhausted, the sun will expand to become a red giant. Although it is unlikely the expanding the sun will engulf the earth, the oceans will boil off, and all plant and animal life will be obliterated as temperatures exceed 1000°F. But there is no cause for alarm. It will cool off again, permanently. The sun will eventually collapse to a small, barely visible white dwarf star, and the earth will be left in the cold darkness of space at -459°F.

So next time somebody talks about global warming, tell them to be thankful for the nice weather, because eventually, it is going to get very, very cold.

Don't believe this article? Do a Google search on the words "temperature earth history".