

**"It's already been a very record-breaking hot year"**  
(Source: Associated Press, 4/9/12)

**WASHINGTON — It's been so warm in the United States this year, especially in March, that national records weren't just broken, they were deep-fried.**

**Temperatures in the lower 48 states were 8.6 degrees above normal for March and 6 degrees higher than average for the first three months of the year, according to calculations by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That far exceeds the old records.**

**The magnitude of how unusual the year has been in the U.S. has alarmed some meteorologists who have warned about global warming. One climate scientist said it's the weather equivalent of a baseball player on steroids, with old records obliterated.**

**"Everybody has this uneasy feeling. This is weird. This is not good," said Jerry Meehl, a climate scientist who specializes in extreme weather at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo. "It's a guilty pleasure. You're out enjoying this nice March weather, but you know it's not a good thing."**

**It's not just March.**

**"It's been ongoing for several months," said Jake Crouch, a climate scientist at NOAA's National Climatic Data Center in Ashville, N.C.**

**Meteorologists say an unusual confluence of several weather patterns, including La Nina, was the direct cause of the warm start to 2012. While individual events can't be blamed on global warming, Couch said this is like the extremes that are supposed to get more frequent because of manmade climate change from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and oil.**

**It's important to note that this unusual winter heat is mostly a North America phenomenon. Much of the rest of the Northern Hemisphere has been cold, said NOAA meteorologist Martin Hoerling.**

**The first quarter of 2012 broke the January-March record by 1.4 degrees. Usually records are broken by just one- or two-tenths of a degree. U.S. temperature records date to 1895.**

**The atypical heat goes back even further. The U.S. winter of 2010-2011 was slightly cooler than normal and one of the snowiest in recent years, but after that things started heating up. The summer of 2011 was the second warmest summer on record.**

**The winter that just ended, which in some places was called the year without**

winter, was the fourth warmest on record. Since last April, it's been the hottest 12-month stretch on record, Crouch said.

But the month where the warmth turned especially weird was March.

Normally, March averages 42.5 degrees across the country. This year, the average was 51.1, which is closer to the average for April. Only one other time — in January 2006 — was the country as a whole that much hotter than normal for an entire month.

The "icebox of America," International Falls, Minn., saw temperatures in the 70s for five days in March, and there were only three days of below zero temperatures all month.

In March, at least 7,775 weather stations across the nation broke daily high temperature records and another 7,517 broke records for night-time heat. Combined, that's more high temperature records broken in one month than ever before, Crouch said.

"When you look at what's happened in March this year, it's beyond unbelievable," said University of Victoria climate scientist Andrew Weaver.

NOAA climate scientist Gabriel Vecchi compared the increase in weather extremes to baseball players on steroids: You can't say an individual homer is because of steroids, but they are hit more often and the long-held records for home runs fall.

They seem to be falling far more often because of global warming, said NASA top climate scientist James Hansen. In a paper he submitted to the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and posted on a physics research archive, Hansen shows that heat extremes aren't just increasing but happening far more often than scientists thought.

What used to be a 1-in-400 hot temperature record is now a 1 in 10 occurrence, essentially 40 times more likely, said Hansen. The warmth in March is an ideal illustration of this, said Hansen, who also has become an activist in fighting fossil fuels.

Weaver, who reviewed the Hansen paper, called it "one of the most stunning examples of evidence of global warming."

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