

CLIMATE NEWS

From Sheldon Whitehouse, Barbara Boxer, and Brian Schatz
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Rising Tides Threaten Kennedy Space Center



Encroaching sea levels and surging waves, exacerbated by global climate change, are eroding the coastline near the Kennedy Space Center in Florida and endangering future launches and current facilities. "There's reason to be nervous now because the problem is so obvious," said Peter Adams, a University of Florida geology professor. Adams and colleague John Jaeger, another geologist at the Florida university, released their findings on the same day the center celebrated its successful test launch of the Orion capsule.

NASA's plans to address climate change include a "managed retreat," which will require officials to move infrastructure, possibly including launch pads, if needed, Bray added. By 2060, Florida's coastline municipalities may experience a roughly 2-foot sea-level rise, according to previous calculations by the U.S. Geological Survey. Glacial melt and rising temperatures are primary drivers of increasing sea levels. In order to protect the shoreline between launch pads 39A and 39B -- pads used by the space shuttle and Apollo missions -- the American space institution has built a barrier of man-made dunes to replace natural ones that had eroded.

(E&E News)

83% of Americans Say Climate is Changing

Eight out of 10 Americans now believe the climate is changing, according to a new survey conducted for Munich Re America, the world's largest reinsurance firm. "Our survey findings indicate that national sentiment over whether or not climatic changes are occurring has finally reached a tipping point," said Tony Kuczinski, president of Munich Re America. The main survey question — "In your opinion, do you believe that climate change is occurring?" — did not specify whether the changes were due to man-made or natural causes. Peter Hoeppe, head of Munich Re's Geo Risks Research, said that about 60% of people say the climate is changing due to man-made causes. 71% of respondents believed greater use of alternative energy sources, such as solar or wind power, would be the most effective in the battle against climate change. Americans in the West (86%) affirmed that climate change is occurring, followed by the Northeast and South (84%), and Midwest (78%). (USA Today)

Study Finds Old Pa. Oil and Gas Wells Leak Methane

There are 300,000 to 500,000 abandoned oil and gas wells in Pennsylvania, and some of them might be leaking significant quantities of the potent greenhouse gas methane, according to a new study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. That abandoned wells may leak methane -- which is 86 times as bad for the climate as CO₂ on a 20-year time scale -- has so far flown under the radar of regulators and industry. Emissions from such wells are not included in most government databases of the oil and gas sector. "There definitely are leaky abandoned oil and gas wells out there, and we should really consider including them in greenhouse gas inventories," said Dr. Mary Kang, a researcher at Stanford University who led the study. In 2013 and 2014, the scientists measured methane near the wellhead and compared that with background measurements of ambient air 2 feet away. They found that both plugged and unplugged abandoned wells were leaking. The researchers found that abandoned wells may have contributed 4 to 7 percent of the total man-made methane emissions from all sectors in Pennsylvania. (Energywire)

Climate Change Threatens to Melt Glacier National Park

What will they call this place once the glaciers are gone? A century ago, this sweep of mountains on the US-Canadian border boasted some 150 ice sheets, many of them scores of feet thick, plastered across summits and tucked into rocky fissures high above parabolic valleys. Today, perhaps 25 survive. In 30 years, there may be none. A warming climate is melting Glacier's glaciers, retreat that promises to change not just tourists' vistas, but also the mountains and everything around them. Streams fed by snowmelt are reaching peak spring flows weeks earlier than in the past, and low summer flows weeks before they used to. Some farmers who depend on irrigation in the parched days of late summer are no longer sure that enough water will be there. Bull trout, once pan-fried over anglers' campfires, are now caught and released to protect a population that is shrinking as water temperatures rise. Shrinking glaciers are only the visible symptom of broader and more serious changes. "We're a snow-driven ecosystem, and glaciers are just a part of that," USGS scientist Dr. Daniel Fagre said. "The way the snow goes is the way our ecosystem goes." (NYT)