

CLIMATE CHANGE

Earth records hottest year ever



Ricky Leath, an outreach specialist with the city of Miami, walks through a homeless encampment as he works with the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust to distribute bottles of water and other supplies to the homeless population, helping them manage high temperatures on May 15. LYNNE SLADKY — ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

BY SETH BORENSTEIN

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Earth recorded its hottest year ever in 2024, with such a big jump that the planet temporarily passed a major climate threshold, weather monitoring agencies announced Friday.

It's the first time in history that the planet was above a hoped-for limit to warming for an entire year, according to measurements from four of the six teams. Scientists say if Earth stays above the threshold in the long term, it will mean increased deaths, destruction, species loss and sea level rise from the extreme weather that accompanies warming.

And that would come on top of a year of deadly climate catastrophes — \$27 billion disasters in the U.S. alone in 2024 — and as 2025 begins with devastating wildfires in southern California.

Last year's global average temperature easily passed 2023's record heat and kept going. It surpassed the long-term warming limit of 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit since the late 1800s that was called for by the 2015 Paris climate pact, according to the European Commission's Copernicus Climate Service, the United Kingdom's Meteorology Office, Japan's weather agency and the private Berkeley Earth team. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and NASA had last year at 2.63 degrees Fahrenheit and 2.65 degrees Fahrenheit.

"The primary reason for these record temperatures is the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere from the burning of coal, oil and gas, said Samantha Burgess, strategic climate lead at Copernicus. "As greenhouse gases continue to accumulate in the atmosphere, temperatures continue to increase, including in the ocean, sea levels continue to rise, and glaciers and ice sheets continue to melt."

Last year was the hottest year for the United States, NOAA said. It was not only the hottest in record keeping that goes back to 1850 but likely the hottest for the planet in 125,000 years, Burgess said.

Comparing it to a car's dashboard warning light, University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd said, "Hurricane Helene, floods in Spain and the weather whiplash fueling wildfires in California are symptoms of this unfortunate climate gear shift."

The 27 weather disasters in the United States that caused at least \$1 billion damage is one fewer than the record set in 2023, according to NOAA. The cost of those disasters was \$182.7 billion.

Hurricane Helene was the costliest and deadliest of the year with at least 219 deaths and \$79.6 billion damage.