

WHO CAUSED SANDY?

by William M. Gray

The main misconception among those who believe in human-induced global warming is to assume that all the many large and varying energy terms of the natural climate system remain constant over long periods and that the only changes that matter for climate are the very miniscule variations of human affects. As extensive and tragic as Sandy's destruction has been, it is not at all beyond the range of what is known about the natural variability of the different meteorological elements which came together to produce it. What is more amazing, at least from an intellectual point-of-view, is the number of prominent government officials, the media, and private citizens who have concluded that Sandy's destruction was the result (or partly the result) of human influences.

There is no rational basis for such a conclusion other than the prevalent psychological need of so many people to assign a simple explanation for any unusually rare and destructive weather event. Associated with this need for a simple explanation is the parallel psychological need of so many to find a scapegoat for our misfortunes? And this need for a scapegoat can often take the form of blaming ourselves (original sin) or the society in which we live.

History tells us of the strong link between the deteriorating weather which occurred in Europe between the Medieval Warm Period (MWP) and the Little Ice Age (LIA), and the burning of women believed to be witches. Estimates are that fifty thousand or more witches were burned to death during the 15th through 17th centuries in Europe. These women were imagined to have a pact with the Devil that enabled them to bring forth damaging weather events or deterioration of climate. And if the weather improved after such burnings it was taken as a sign that these women did indeed have a direct link to the Devil.

Despite the world's enlightenment that has occurred since those times – there appears to still be a residue desire within our human nature, even today, for an easy explanation for unusual damaging events, a need to find a scapegoat and a need to look to ourselves for part of the explanation of destructive weather events like hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, heat waves, floods, etc. Blaming last summer's US droughts, wild fires, and hot weather on human-induced climate change is a recent example. As if we humans would ever be able to influence such large and unique nature events!

Why must we, as in previous ages, continue to try to suggest that humans may have been a contributing element in major destructive weather events? If it were really possible for humans to be a contributor to severe weather or worsening climate, would it not also be logical to believe that humans might also be a contributing element to spells of good weather or favorable climate change?

The longest recorded period of no major (Cat 3-4-5) hurricane landfalls in the US has occurred during the last seven years (2006-2012). We have also had 20 fewer major US hurricane landfall events in the last 47 year period (1966-2012) than we had during the earlier 47 year (1919-1965) period. And this decrease in landfalling major hurricanes occurred during the time of rising CO₂ levels. If humans could really influence destructive climate-weather events like Sandy, should they not also be able to take some credit for influencing the recent decades of reduced number of US landfalling major hurricanes? Landfalling US major hurricanes are known to cause about 80-85 percent of all normalized US landfalling tropical cyclone destruction.

It appears that we humans have, unknowingly, made an enormous contribution in recent decades to the reduction of US hurricane destruction (see Figure). Should we not pat ourselves on the back and continue to increase our fossil-fuel utilization?

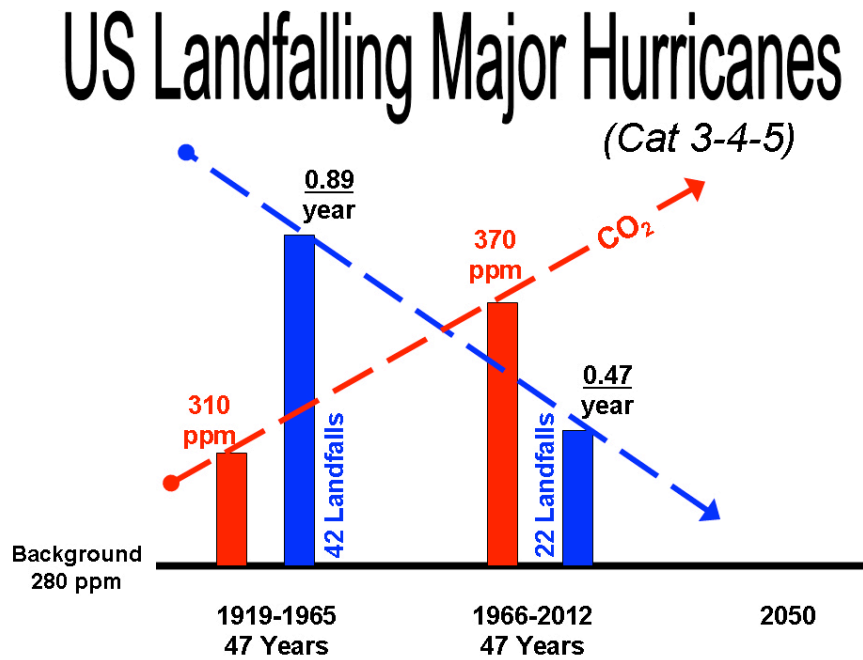


Illustration of how US landfalling major hurricane numbers have been trending downward while atmospheric CO₂ amounts have been increasing.