

# Global warming leads to weather of mass destruction

By Eban Goodstein  
and Edward Wolf

Imagine this lead on the nightly news:

*"U.S. scientists today announced a new threat to our national security. Key to the plot is an attack on reservoirs in the Western United States that could cut water supplies in half."*

*"Here's how it would work: An odorless, tasteless gas emitted from pipes placed all over the planet would blanket the globe, slowly warming average temperatures. Within a few decades, warmer winters would dramatically cut mountain snowpacks, leaving Western states high and dry in the summer months. Details at 11."*

Sound like Dr. Evil's plot in the next "Austin Powers" sequel? Guess again. That odorless, tasteless gas is carbon dioxide, and the pipes are on coal-fired power plants, on household rooftops, and on our cars and yours. The blanket

is the greenhouse effect, which has already raised global temperatures more than 1 degree over the century and is slated to generate a further increase of between 2 and 11 degrees within our grandchildren's lifetimes.

To put that forecast in perspective, today's world is a mere 9 degrees warmer than during the last Ice Age, when vast glaciers covered much of North America. The result of a comparable warming during the 21st cen-

tury is a "WMD" threat we ignore at our peril: weather of massive destructiveness.

This winter provided clear evidence that even a few degrees can make a huge difference. Portland area utility bills showed this February to be 3 degrees warmer on average than last year.

The mid-February snowpack on Mount Hood was 62 percent below normal. And that doesn't just mean lousy skiing. It means summer water shortages and a return to the ugly social conflicts of two years ago,

when Klamath Basin farmers squared off against federal water authorities in a fight over dwindling supplies.

Scientists at regional research labs have forecast a 50 percent reduction in the average Oregon and Washington snowpack over the next half-century, under reasonable assumptions about greenhouse gas pollution.

Losing that much water would transform the lush Pacific Northwest into something more like water-scarce

Southern California. And as we learned last summer, dry conditions turn our forests into tinderboxes.

A recent study by atmospheric scientist Philip Mote at the University of Washington revealed that snowpack declines already have occurred. Mote analyzed snow records for 145 sites in four states and British Columbia from 1950 through 1992. He found a steady decline in water content throughout the region, in some

places close to 60 percent. Mote attributed much of the drop to higher temperatures.

Global warming is no longer in dispute: It is here, now. And it is no exaggeration to say that, unchecked, global warming will cause more economic hardship and destroy more natural ecosystems than any industrial pollutant in the history of the Pacific Northwest.

The Northwest is poised to lead the nation in clean-energy solutions that can slow global warming by curbing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to the region's historical reliance on hydropower (itself jeopardized by the warming scenarios), wind power already contributes to a large and growing share of electricity needs.

From superefficient "hypercars" and the manufacture of photovoltaic solar cells to planning for a regional hydrogen infrastructure, visionary Pacific Northwest entrepreneurs are patiently laying the groundwork for an economy that can wean us from reliance on fossil fuels in time to reduce the global warming threat.

But until the region's leaders summon the political will to move forcefully to hasten that shift, weather of massive destructiveness is certain to cloud our collective future.

*Eban Goodstein is executive director and Edward Wolf is chairman of the Portland-based Green House Network. Goodstein is an associate professor of economics at Lewis & Clark College. Wolf is a Portland-based writer and editor of the book "Salmon Nation: People and Fish at the Edge."*

## On the web

For more information, see [www.greenhousenet.org](http://www.greenhousenet.org).

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