

Re: Cherry Picking Is Not Science

Dec 2, 2006

Dear Editor,

Ronald Galdabini's naive glee (letters, 11/30/06) with this year's historically normal hurricane season is understandable but not scientific. People who are interested in ascertaining the facts, as opposed to those merely rationalizing their political beliefs, do not cherry pick the evidence until they find data supporting their position. This year's hurricane season in the United States is not representative of big picture trends.

No question science is a complicated and messy process. Some have reasonably asked: "Wasn't there going to be a new ice age?" Yes, preliminary isotopic data obtained during the 1980's from air bubbles trapped in ancient ice cores suggested that we were heading towards a global cooling period consistent with previous geological cycles . Although it was known that carbon dioxide levels and global temperatures had been rising for almost a century, many scientists at that time had trouble believing that humans could globally and significantly alter the climate. But more detailed ice core studies, along with improved land and sea temperature measurements, forced scientists to realize that relatively recent human activities such as rice cultivation, livestock production, and even more recently fossil fuel consumption, has strongly altered this geological time scale cooling trend.

If it's any consolation we should try to remember that if 2007, like 2005, is a record setting season for temperatures and major hurricanes, scientists will not stop making temperature measurements, they will not stop examining ice core data and they will not cherry pick the evidence to support a particular ideology.

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