

## **Agreement on climate inches forward as impacts spread**

by Bill McCann

In an unprecedented show of solidarity, leaders of 175 nations, including the U.S., got together on Earth Day last week to sign the Paris Agreement on climate change.

It was considered a big step toward getting the world's countries to set and meet targets for reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are heating up the Earth. Last year was the hottest year on record and this year is shaping up to be even hotter.

Signers now will have to go back and get their governments to approve the agreement. The Obama Administration has signaled that it will do so this year, which means President Barack Obama likely will sign an executive order rather than take it to the recalcitrant Republican-dominated Congress.

Despite overwhelming evidence that humans are responsible for climate change by burning fossil fuels, the energy giants, backed by their minions in Congress, have done a good PR job of creating doubt. The PR effort is similar to what the cigarette companies did for decades to dispute the health hazards of smoking.

Meanwhile, for some small Pacific island nations, the climate agreement isn't coming fast enough. Many Pacific islands already have been affected by extreme weather, floods, storm surges and rising sea levels from melting ice. Scientists have predicted that by the end of the century the Maldives, with 400,000 people, could be under water. Thousands of people already have fled the island nations of Tuvalu and Nauru, said to be at ground zero of climate change.

Ground zero in the U.S. is Florida where in some coastal cities sea water has surged into streets and water supplies. The mayors of Miami and other cities have been pleading for state and federal action on climate change, including promoting the use of clean energy. Miami Beach is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to try to keep the rising sea water out.

Other parts of the U.S are affected too, according to NASA, the folks who took us into space, and who put into orbit satellites that can keep watch on what changes are happening to the Earth.

Global climate change already has caused glaciers to shrink, ice on rivers and lakes to break up earlier and plant and animal ranges to shift, NASA says in its climate-change web site. Future effects will include continued rises in temperatures, heavier rain and snow storms, more droughts and heat waves in the Southwest, stronger hurricanes and continued rises in sea level, says NASA, which is facing its own problems with sea-level rise and erosion at its rocket-launch facility in Florida.

"Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities," NASA states. "In addition,

most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position.”

The U.S. military has serious concerns too and has been working for years to address potential impacts of climate change on its installations worldwide. One facility that already has experienced problems with sea level rise is the Norfolk, Virginia, Naval Station, the world’s largest naval complex.

The Department of Defense also has investigated the impacts of climate change on national security. A report issued last summer found that climate change is a security risk because it will aggravate problems such as poverty, social tensions and pollution, therefore threatening the stability of a number of countries.

As warnings from scientists persist, Americans have two basic choices: We can support the Paris Agreement and President Obama’s plans as a good first step to address climate change. Or we can ignore the warnings, pretend that scientists have created some global conspiracy, and leave the dire consequences of our inaction to our children and future generations.