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Information and Knowledge Management Division

BBC

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By: Matt McGrath

Climate change has made the grasses and shrubs that are fuelling the Los Angeles fires more vulnerable to burning, scientists say.

Rapid swings between dry and wet conditions in the region in recent years have created a massive amount of tinder-dry vegetation that is ready to ignite.

Decades of drought in California were followed by extremely heavy rainfall for two years in 2022 and 2023, but that then flipped again to very dry conditions in the autumn and winter of 2024.

Scientists say in a new study that climate change has boosted what they call these "whiplash" conditions globally by 31-66% since the middle of the 20th Century.

The wildfires have spread across parts of the Los Angeles area, leading to at least five deaths, burning down hundreds of buildings, and prompting evacuation orders for more than 179,000 people.

"This whiplash sequence in California has increased fire risk twofold," said lead author Daniel Swain from UCLA.

"First, by greatly increasing the growth of flammable grass and brush in the months leading up to fire season, and then by drying it out to exceptionally high levels with the extreme dryness and warmth that followed."

The researchers say that with every degree of warming the atmosphere is able to evaporate, absorb and release 7% more water.

This "expanding atmospheric sponge" as the scientists term it, not only leads to flooding when things are wetter, but it pulls extra moisture out of the plants and soils when the drier conditions set in.

Other researchers said the new paper underlined that the fact that the type of whiplash volatility was an important element in driving both floods and fires.

"It's clear from the devastation caused by the current wildfires in LA that rapid changes in the volatility of precipitation and evaporation can have a large impact," said Prof Sir Brian Hoskins, Chair of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change at Imperial College London.

"It's also interesting to see the paper's findings that climate models likely under-estimate the changes seen so far, but even those models suggest a doubling of the volatility for a global temperature warming of 3C – now looking increasingly likely we'll reach."

The new study adds to the growing body of evidence that a warmer climate has altered the background conditions to the raging wildfires currently burning around Los Angeles. Much of the Western US including California experienced a decades-long drought that ended just two years ago.

The resulting wet conditions since then have seen the rapid growth of shrubs, grasses and trees, the perfect fuel for fires.

However, last summer was very hot and was followed by dry autumn and winter season with almost no rain - downtown Los Angeles has only received 0.16 inches of rain since October, more than four inches below average.

Researchers believe that a warming world is increasing the conditions that are conducive to wildland fire, including low relative humidity.

These "fire weather" days are increasing in many parts of the world, with climate change making these conditions more severe and the fire season lasting longer in many parts of the world, scientists have shown.

In California, the situation has been made worse by the topography with fires burning more intensely and moving more rapidly in steep terrain.

This area of California is also dominated by naturally very fire-prone shrub vegetation.

"While fires are common and natural in this region, California has seen some of the most significant increases in the length and extremity of the fire weather season globally in recent decades, driven largely climate change," said Professor Stefan Doerr, Director of the Centre for Wildfire Research, at Swansea University.

"That said, it is too early to say to what degree climate change has made these specific fires more extreme. This will need to be evaluated in a more detailed attribution analysis."

BUSINESS WORLD

[EU warns of 'serious blow' from Trump on climate change](#)

Global efforts to address climate change will be dealt a severe blow if US President-elect Donald Trump again pulls the country out of the Paris Agreement, the European Union's (EU) head of climate change policy has warned.

Mr. Trump's transition team has prepared executive orders to withdraw the United States — currently the world's second-biggest polluter, after China — from the main global treaty on climate change, according to sources in the team.

"If that were to happen, that would be a serious blow for international climate diplomacy," EU climate commissioner Wopke Hoekstra told Reuters in an interview.

Another US exit from the Paris Agreement would require other countries to "double down on climate diplomacy" in response, he said.

"There's no alternative to make sure that, in the end, everyone chips in, because climate change is indiscriminate," Mr. Hoekstra said of the United Nations (UN) climate talks. "This truly is a problem that the world needs to solve together."

The Paris Agreement is the centerpiece of United Nations climate negotiations in which nearly 200 countries discuss steps to curb emissions and funding to pay for these efforts.

The US has played a central role in the talks, including by working with China — the world's biggest polluter and second-biggest economy — to lay the groundwork for recent global climate deals.

A turnaround is expected under Mr. Trump, who returns to the White House on Jan. 20. He has called climate change a hoax, and withdrew from the Paris Accord during his first term from 2017 to 2021. Last month he warned the EU it must buy more US oil and gas or face tariffs.

Mr. Hoekstra said the EU will "constructively engage" with the new US administration on issues including climate change. He said the Commission is reaching out to US contacts across the political spectrum, including at the non-federal level.

“Making sure that our American friends, as much as is possible, are actually staying on board and are working on this together with us, is clearly something I will strive for,” he said.

But even as Brussels faces pressure to step up its climate leadership to fill a potential US vacuum, the EU is set to miss a February deadline for all countries to send new national climate plans to the U.N. The outgoing Biden administration already published the US’s contribution.

Mr. Hoekstra said the timings of the EU’s political cycle did not line up with the U.N. deadline but that Europe would have its 2035 climate plan ready by this year’s U.N. climate summit in November in Belem, Brazil.

“The important thing here is to make sure we have an ambitious number before we walk into Belem,” he said. “I can promise you that we will have.”

First months of 2025 likely rainy amid La Niña conditions, says PAGASA

By: Edg Adrian A. Eva

The Philippines is expected to experience above-normal rainfall conditions from January to March due to La Niña conditions, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said on Monday.

According to recent data, cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific, observed since September, have strengthened and reached La Niña conditions by December.

“It is likely that this La Niña condition will continue at least until JFM (January-February-March) 2025 season as suggested by several climate model,” PAGASA said in a press statement on Monday.

Under La Niña conditions, the chance of heavy, above-normal rainfall in the country is likely, said by Ana Liza S. Solis, PAGASA’s Assistant Weather Services Chief and Chief of the Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section.

“So, makakaranas pa rin tayo ng maraming [We will still experience a lot of] rain-bearing weather systems due to the combined effects of La Niña-like conditions, Shearline, Intertropical Convergence Zone, Low Pressure Area, at kasama itong [and this includes] Northeast Monsoon activity,” Ms. Solis said in an interview.

There is also an increased chance of tropical cyclone activity within the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) during the forecast period, PAGASA said.

“For 2025, yung first six months natin (during the first six months), we have forecasted around two to eight tropical cyclones, at least for the first quarter of the year from January to June,” Ms. Solis said.

Ms. Solis noted that tropical cyclones are usually uncommon during the early months of the year. However, due to La Niña conditions, their occurrence is possible. She urged caution, particularly in areas such as Bicol Region, Eastern Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Palawan, and MIMAROPA.

“Kailangang laging maging handa sa mga possible na mga changing weather patterns natin at this time of the year [We need to always be prepared for possible changes in our weather patterns during this time of the year],” Ms. Solis said.

Apart from rainy conditions, colder temperatures are expected from January to February, Ms. Solis added, as the Northeast Monsoon remains in effect, particularly affecting the northern and central parts of Luzon and the eastern parts of the Visayas.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

[BCDA conducting study for waste-to-energy facility inside Clark](#)

By: Alden M. Monzon

The Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) is planning to put up a waste-to-energy facility inside the Clark Freeport and Special Economic Zone, with a study now ongoing to determine the feasibility of the idea.

A representative from the BCDA told the Inquirer on Monday that the study is being jointly done with the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center in line with their goal of fostering smart and sustainable development.

In a separate statement, the BCDA said that the planned facility is intended to boost the power supply and serve the requirements of locators and investors in Clark.

It said that it is also mean as a sustainable alternative to landfills, highlighting its significance amid the continuous increase in waste generated in the country and around the world.

“The BCDA is committed to adopting smart and green innovations to push for the sustainable development of our properties. Utilizing waste-to-energy technology, in particular, will modernize solid waste management and promote green energy, helping usher Clark’s transition towards a circular economy,” BCDA president and chief executive officer Joshua Bingcang said.

Citing the World Bank’s 2018 study entitled “What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050,” the BCDA said that global annual waste generation is projected to jump to 3.4 billion tonnes by 2050.

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It emphasized that carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions from solid waste treatment and disposal, primarily driven by open dumps and landfills without gas collection systems, reached 1.6 billion tonnes in 2016, and is anticipated to increase to 2.6 billion tonnes by 2050.

“With waste-to-energy technology, the BCDA can do its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while also addressing the energy requirements of our community,” said Bingcang.

The BCDA said its waste-to-energy study will include site selection, as well as technical, environmental, social, legal, financial, and economic analysis for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of the facility.

It added that once the study is completed, it will open the project for public bidding.

The government-owned and controlled corporation added that the project is intended to be structured and undertaken pursuant to Republic Act No. 11966, or more commonly known as the Public Private Partnership Code of the Philippines, and its implementing rules and regulations.

[PH firms champion green spaces, sustainability standards](#)

As the world grapples with the urgent threat of climate change, creating sustainable spaces has become imperative to protect the environment from waste and pollution and conserve vital resources.

Thus, the green industry is experiencing significant growth, driven by the growing demand for eco-friendly solutions such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, green building, and waste management.

In the Philippines, a wave of innovative building projects is setting the standard for climate resilience and sustainability. These efforts are spearheaded by the Philippine Green Building Council (PHILGBC) through its “educate, advocate, and rate” campaign, which plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable building practices across the country. Local companies are not only adapting to climate change but are leading the charge by integrating robust adaptation and biodiversity strategies into their development projects.

PHILGBC and the Philippine Business for Education (PBE) have established the Green Building Sector Skills Council (GBSSC) through A Future that Works, a program supported by the Australian Government that aims to bridge jobs and skills gaps by organizing industry leaders and experts through Sectors Skills Councils and communicating labor market needs to align them with education and training.

Projects like NEO’s BERDE-certified buildings and Aboitiz InfraCapital’s Lima Estates showcase the integration of green building principles, from energy efficiency to biodiversity conservation. The BERDE program was established by PHILGBC to develop the Philippines’ own national voluntary green building rating system to spur green building projects in the country.

Residential developments such as Mandani Bay Suites and Botanika Nature Residences are also leading the way in this field, blending urban living with nature through innovative designs and sustainable materials.

Beyond Metro Manila, projects like HTLand’s Mandaue development and Cebu Exchange are setting new standards for regional sustainability. By incorporating features like stormwater recycling, energy-efficient technologies, and urban agriculture, these projects contribute to climate resilience and promote a greener future.

Meanwhile, developments like Latitude Corporate Center and Parqal are redefining urban spaces by prioritizing green infrastructure and community engagement. These

projects demonstrate that sustainable development can go hand-in-hand with creating vibrant and livable cities.

The future looks promising for green building in the Philippines, especially as the GBSSC ramps up its education activities. This initiative is expected to catalyze even more green building projects as more professionals are trained in sustainable construction practices, ensuring that the next wave of buildings not only meet current standards but set new benchmarks in environmental responsibility.

Under the guidance of the PHILGBC, these initiatives highlight how integrating biodiversity and sustainable practices into building and operational strategies not only addresses the immediate impacts of climate change but also ensures long-term environmental health and sustainability.

As these companies lead by example, they forge a path that hopefully many others will follow, securing a resilient and sustainable future for the next generations of Filipinos.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[New global warming records on the way, warns EU climate change service](#)

With 2024 set to be the hottest year on record, new temperature records are expected in the near future, warned the head of the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service on Wednesday.

Copernicus data says last year was the hottest on record, with the global average temperature increase reaching the 1.5°C threshold of the Paris Climate Agreement for the first time.

"The fundamental threat that we are facing is the fact that the climate we are experiencing now is completely different from the climate in which we grew up, the climate of our fathers and grandparents and older generations. So the entire society needs to adapt to a climate that is fundamentally different," Copernicus' Carlo Buontempo told Anadolu.

Emphasizing that this situation affects all areas of natural systems, Buontempo said: "We see changes in the water cycle. We see changes in agriculture. We see changes in our own health, with heat-related mortality going up by 30 percent in the last 20 years in Europe."

"So this is a fundamental shift, and the sooner we grasp the immensity of this shift and start to use the knowledge, the data, the insight that we have about the climate, the better we'll be prepared and we'll be able to cope with this change," he added.

'We are bound to see new record'

On what to expect in 2025, he said: "The impact of El Nino, which certainly played a role at the beginning of the year in warming up of the climate system, that impact is not going to be there, necessarily in 2025 and because of that, it's possible that the 2025 one be as warm as 2024, we don't know yet. What is certain is that, on average, the temperature of the next few years will be higher. So we are bound to see new record. We are bound to see new hottest month, new hottest years in the years to come."

Commenting on possible extreme natural events in the summer or winter of 2025, he said: "We cannot predict when the next floods or the next heat wave will happen, necessarily, but we can sort of have an educated guess on the balance of probability on how certain kind of event may become more likely to occur."

'We need to get prepared'

"Heat waves are an obvious example. We have seen record breaking temperature, an incredible large fraction of the global surface experiencing extreme heat waves, or extreme, extreme heat stress, to say better. And this is bound to happen. You know, more widely with heat wave lasting longer and being more intense than the past, we don't know when, where or when the next heat wave will hit, but we should get prepared, because it will hit some parts of the globe and will become more intense, longer on average, than those we have seen in the past," said Buontempo.

Stating that another example is the increase in water vapor, he explained: "As the temperature goes up, so does the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere. This means that some extreme events, in particular flooding, are likely to become more intense. Events associated with heavy rainfall – where large amounts of rain occur in a short period – are expected to become more intense as well."

'I think this is a shift that the entire society needs to do'

On actions people can take to fight climate change, Buontempo said: "I think this is a shift that the entire society needs to do, from how our houses are insulated or how we change our habits to deal with warmer temperatures and from the time we go shopping or to our personal preference in terms of holidays to what we eat to how we travel and so on."

"And now we are, a year after just with a new record, a very significant record. For the first time, we have an annual year passing the 1.5 degrees anomaly with respect to pre-industrial, this is the same number mentioned in the Paris Agreement, and this is, I think, from a psychological point of view, quite important," he added.

THE MANILA TIMES

Climate disasters drive high losses in 2024

Climate change fueled natural disasters that caused \$320 billion in losses last year, German reinsurance giant Munich Re said Thursday, warning that "our planet's weather machine is shifting to a higher gear."

The amount of insured losses totaled \$140 billion (136 billion euros) over the past 12 months, making 2024 the third-highest total since 1980, Munich Re said in a report.

The findings echoed similar figures from Swiss Re, the other leader of the reinsurance industry, which calculated overall losses of around \$310 billion, of which \$135 billion were insured.

Last year is almost certain to go down as the hottest on record and the first to be 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter than before the industrial revolution, the critical threshold laid down in the 2015 Paris accord on fighting climate change.

"Our planet's weather machine is shifting to a higher gear," said Tobias Grimm, chief climate scientist at Munich Re.

"Everyone pays the price for worsening weather extremes" driven by climate change, Grimm added, noting that the burden fell hardest on "people in countries with little insurance protection or publicly funded support to help with recovery."

"The global community must finally take action and find ways to strengthen the resilience of all countries, and especially those that are the most vulnerable," he said.

Above average

Overall and insured losses in 2024 were both well above the benchmark averages of the last 10 and 30 years, Munich Re said.

The totals were unusually high thanks to a "combination of rare major catastrophes, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, and more frequent events, such as hail, localized flooding and forest fires," Grimm said.

"These phenomena have particularly increased in intensity and frequency over the years," he said.

Weather catastrophes were behind 93 percent of the overall losses, as a series of hurricanes swept around the tropics, Munich Re calculated.

Cyclones alone accounted for \$135 billion in losses, the majority of which were registered in the United States, which was buffeted by a series of powerful storms.

Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which blew across the southeastern United States in quick succession in September and October, were the two costliest catastrophes of the year.

Helene resulted in losses of \$56 billion, causing flooding deep into the US interior and leaving over 200 people dead.

Meanwhile in Europe, the region around Valencia in Spain saw the continent's most serious catastrophe, with over 200 dead and causing \$11 billion in damages.

Heavy toll

A flood attribution study in Spain showed that climate change had "doubled the likelihood" of precipitation like that seen around Valencia, Grimm said.

The region saw about 500 mm (20 inches) of precipitation in a single day in October, as much as the area normally experiences in an entire year, Munich Re said.

In total, around 11,000 people lost their lives as a result of natural catastrophes in 2024, a heavy toll that was nonetheless lower than average, Munich Re said.

The year's deadliest storm was Typhoon Yagi, which swept through the Philippines to mainland China, killing some 850 people and causing total losses of \$14 billion.

"In developing countries, the lack of infrastructure and inadequate building regulations amplify human and material losses," Grimm said.

Another problem was the gap in coverage in such areas, to which one solution was so-called parametric insurance, Grimm said.

"Defined parameters, such as wind strength, enable rapid compensation after a storm, without the need to prove individual damages," he said.

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