

# Center for Science and Public Policy

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## Fox News Misled Viewers on Climate Science, says CSPP

**Washington, DC** - The Center for Science and Public Policy (CSPP), a Washington, D.C. based think tank, says that before airing an hour-long special, titled “The Heat Is On: The Case of Global Warming,” the Fox News Channel informed its viewers they were about to be misinformed on the science of global warming, and then proceeded to do just that.

Said Robert Ferguson, Executive Director for CSPP, “Presenter Rick Folbaum and a cast of mostly non-scientists, celebrities and lawyers employed a transparent form of deception: telling only one side of a story or situation with intent to mislead. Worse, the side they did present wasn’t even scientifically credible itself.”

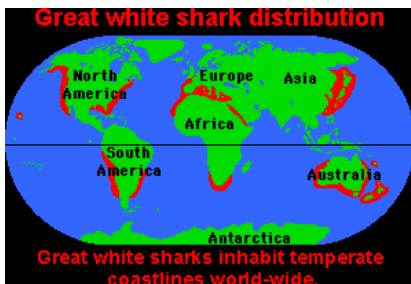
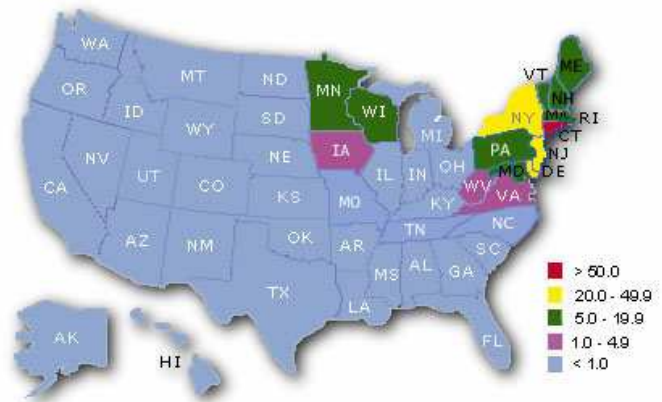
In short, FOX perpetuated a recent pattern of those claiming the backing of science in advancing alarming claims which have little to no basis in fact.

Just how unscientific was FOX? CSPP researchers offered a few representative examples.

**Claim: Warming is responsible for the increased incidents of Lyme disease.**

**Science:** Fabrication. Leading specialists have found the opposite to be true: “Mean temperatures show weak and inconsistent correlations with incidence.”<sup>1</sup> Incidents are instead related to New England farmlands returning to forests near homes, creating “edge habitat” and an explosion in deer populations which carry the black-leg tick. Lyme disease is not a problem in the warmer Southern states.<sup>2</sup>

2000 Reported Lyme Disease Cases Per 100,000 Population (Incidence Rate)



**Claim: Warming is responsible for recent appearance of a Great White shark in Alaskan waters.**

**Science:** Fabrication. Great Whites (*Carcharodon carcharias*) are endothermic – able to elevate their body temperature above that of the surrounding water. They can tolerate a broad temperature range, providing them access to prey (primarily coastal pinnipeds) over a wide

ecological niche -- including sub-arctic Alaskan waters. They have long been observed along the U.S. coastline from California to Alaska.<sup>3</sup>

**Claim: Warming is responsible for malarial outbreaks.**

*Science:* False. Not a single instance is supported by evidence in the peer reviewed literature. Studies have shown no relation between climate (periodic ups and downs) and malaria incidence, but lots of evidence for drug resistance, cessation of use of insecticides like DDT, movements of people from malaria-burdened lowlands, etc. Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, malaria was endemic in the U.S. and widespread in many temperate regions, with major epidemics as far north as the Arctic Circle.<sup>4</sup>

**Claim: 2003 European heat wave was responsible for many deaths.**

*Science:* Half truth. Lack of adaptation and government policies were primary causes of deaths. It is the rare, unexpected heat wave that often kills. Where heat waves are more common, populations adapt. Although no one has suggested that Europe will have future climates like the American southwest, the heat experienced in Europe in 2003 was far less severe than *normal* summer conditions experienced by residents of Phoenix, Arizona or Las Vegas, Nevada. Adaptations such as wide availability of air-conditioned homes, businesses and shelters are made possible by access to relatively inexpensive electricity – something made more cost-prohibitive by some European energy policies.

**Claim: Warming is causing world-wide loss of coral reefs.**

*Science:* Exaggeration. Two marine biologists have recently concluded that from 10,000 to 6,000 years ago, extratropical North Atlantic sea surface temperatures (SSTs) were 2-3°C warmer than at present and coral reefs flourished.<sup>5</sup> They reported that the fossil record clearly demonstrates the ability of corals to *expand* their ranges poleward in response to global warming and to "reconstitute reef communities in the face of rapid environmental change." In fact, they report that coral range expansions are occurring *today*, noting that "there is mounting evidence that coral species are responding to recent patterns of increased SSTs by *expanding* their latitudinal ranges."

Herbert Glacier

**Claim: Alaska's Herbert Glacier and Montana's Glacier National Park are melting.**

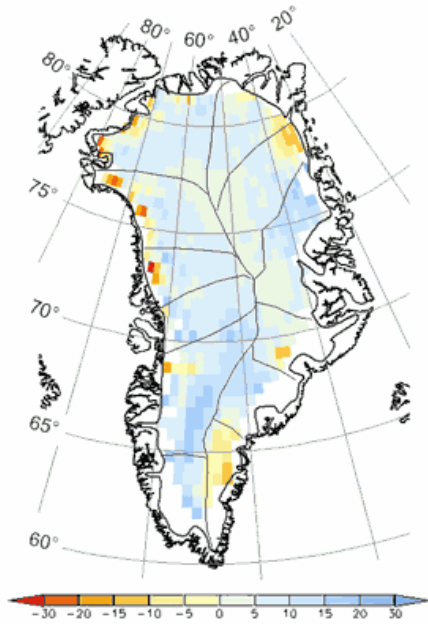
*Science:* Natural process, not man-caused. A recent 300-year study of Glacier Park found that glaciers have advanced and retreated repeatedly, and *not* in sync with variable greenhouse gas levels.<sup>6</sup> Another study found Alaskan glaciers have had periods of advance and retreat for the last 700 years at least. A



researcher at the University of Alaska Southeast reports that about 800 years ago Herbert Glacier (featured by FOX) retreated miles back into its valley enough for a forest to grow, and then it advanced and receded again, and then advanced. Now it's again receding.<sup>7</sup> There were no SUVs or power plants 800 years ago.

**Claim: Warming is melting in the Antarctic will contribute to sea level rise and flooding of coastal areas.**

**Science:** Wrong. A robust literature shows that during the period of time FOX's "experts" claim the planet experienced the warmest temperatures of the past two millennia, Antarctica experienced a net *buildup* of ice that actually *removed* water from the earth's oceans.<sup>8</sup>



Greenland ice-sheet elevation change in cm/year (see colour scale) derived from 11 years of ERS-1/ERS-2 satellite altimeter data, 1992-2003. Result: 5.4 cm/year increase.

**Claim: Warming is melting Greenland ice sheets and raising sea levels.**

**Science:** The rest of the story. Fox pointed to the melting and thinning of ice in the *coastal areas* of Greenland. However, *opposite* changes are occurring in the *much larger interior* ice sheet. A Norwegian-led team of scientists<sup>9</sup> studying an 11-year period (1992-2003) of Greenland ice sheet activity reports that "below 1500 meters, the elevation-change rate is  $-2.0 \pm 0.9$  cm/year, in qualitative agreement with reported thinning in the ice-sheet margins," *but* that "an *increase* of  $6.4 \pm 0.2$  cm/year is found in the *vast interior areas* above 1500 meters." Spatially averaged over the bulk of the ice sheet, the *net* result is a mean *increase* of  $5.4 \pm 0.2$  cm/year, "or ~6.0 cm over 11 years. The Greenland Ice Sheet has *not* been wasting away, but has been growing at a very respectable rate. This increase, like the one in Antarctic, is *removing* water from the oceans.

"One could scientifically dispute nearly every claim made in the FOX program," said Ferguson,

"but the public never had the opportunity to hear it."

Concluded Ferguson, "If a trial judge allowed only the prosecution's case, and then told the jury to form their verdict on that testimony alone, would such be 'fair and balanced'? Apparently Mr. Folbaum and FOX believe so."

<sup>1</sup> Effects of Acorn Production and Mouse Abundance on Abundance and *Borrelia burgdorferi* Infection Prevalence of Nymphal *Ixodes scapularis* Ticks  
Richard S. Ostfeld, Eric M. Schaubert, Charles D. Canham, Felicia Keesing, Clive G. Jones, Jerry O. Wolff  
Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases. Mar 2001, Vol. 1, No. 1: 55-63

Also: [http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/review/nantucket\\_fever.shtml](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/review/nantucket_fever.shtml)

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/facres/splmn.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aldf.com/usmap.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/sharks/species/Greatwhite.shtml>

Also, <http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/2002/january9/sharks-a.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ff.org/centers/csspp/pdf/8-CSPP-gwdisease2005.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Precht, W.F. and Aronson, R.B. 2004. Climate flickers and range shifts of reef corals. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 2: 307-314.

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- Also, see: <http://www.co2science.org/scripts/CO2ScienceB2C/articles/V8/N10/EDIT.jsp>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.co2science.org/scripts/CO2ScienceB2C/articles/V7/N27/EDIT.jsp>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://juneaualaska.com/visit/stories/herbertglacier.shtml>
- <sup>8</sup> Church, J.A., White, N.J., Coleman, R., Lambeck, K. and Mitrovica, J.X. 2004. Estimates of the regional distribution of sea level rise over the 1950-2000 period. *Journal of Climate* **17**: 2609-2625.  
Davis, C.H., Li, Y., McConnell, J.R., Frey, M.M. and Hanna, E. 2005. Snowfall-driven growth in East Antarctic Ice Sheet mitigates recent sea-level rise. *Scienceexpress/www.scienceexpress.org/science.1110662*.  
Also: <http://www.co2science.org/scripts/CO2ScienceB2C/articles/V8/N24/EDIT.jsp>
- <sup>9</sup> Johannessen, O.M., Khvorostovsky, K., Miles, M.W. and Bobylev, L.P. 2005. Recent ice-sheet growth in the interior of Greenland. *Scienceexpress / www.scienceexpress.org / 20 October 2005*.  
Also see: <http://www.brightsurf.com/news/headlines/view.article.php?ArticleID=21743>  
Also see: <http://www.co2science.org/scripts/CO2ScienceB2C/articles/V8/N44/EDIT.jsp>