

Study says sun getting hotter

WASHINGTON (AP) - The sun is getting hotter, adding heat to an Earth already thought to be warming from greenhouse gases.

Solar radiation reaching the Earth is 0.036 percent warmer than it was in 1986, when the current solar cycle was beginning, a researcher reports in a study to be published Friday in the journal Science. The finding is based on an analysis of satellites that measure the temperature of sunlight.

The increase is only a small fraction of the total heat from the sun, but in a century it would be enough to seriously aggravate problems of global warming thought to be caused by greenhouse gases, says Richard C. Willson of Columbia University's Center for Climate Systems Research.

Willson said that most researchers expect greenhouse gases to warm the planet by 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit in the next 100 years. Solar irradiance could add another 0.72 degrees F and "that is not an insignificant number. It is smaller than the greenhouse effect, but it is not trivial," he said.

"This is a significant increase," said John Firor of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo. "It would increase the rate at which we go into warming."

Firor said that based on the current estimate of how greenhouse gases will warm the planet over the next century, the solar heat increase found by Willson would boost that warming trend by about 20 percent.

Although studies show that the Earth has warmed about one degree in the last century and the trend continues, there is a division among scientists about what is causing it. Some believe it is a natural cycle for the planet, unrelated to humans. Others blame the warming on an increase in the atmosphere of greenhouse gases, mostly carbon dioxide from the burning of oil, gas, coal and wood.

At an international meeting in Japan in three months, the United States and other nations will debate the need to reduce the burning of fuels in order to slow global warming.

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