What’s Up With the Weather?

Climate change is happening now.

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When I first heard about climate change and its predicted effects on Earth, like many people, I thought it was the stuff of science fiction. We’ll be long gone by the time that happens, I told myself. But now that a glacier has melted in Iceland, Isle de Jean Charles, an island in the Louisiana bayou, is sinking and several islands in the South Pacific are losing increasingly large amounts of surface area to rising seas and ferocious storms, I reversed my thinking. Drastic differences in weather patterns have already begun to alter Earth’s landscape.

Scientists sounded the alarm years ago. During the 1990s, the viewpoint that Earth’s climate system transforms gradually shifted to the idea that weather conditions are much more volatile and can mutate rapidly. Researchers warned that extremes in atmospheric patterns would lead to changes in average temperatures as well as the onset of droughts, floods and extreme heat that would result in poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

Evidence gathered from tree rings, ice cores, sediment and other sources confirms how widely, rapidly—sometimes after just one decade—and unexpectedly Earth’s climate can change.

Triggered by both natural occurrences and human activity, these conditions can take place so rapidly that people have difficulty adapting to the changing environment. Understandably, then, downplaying or ignoring climate change and making no effort to address the issue would set the stage for disaster.

Unfortunately, disaster seems imminent. In the Amazon—the world’s largest rainforest—industrial activities such as mining, logging and agricultural projects drive ongoing deforestation, which has already resulted in destructive fires that threaten millions of species of plant and animal life.

This will influence weather in the region and throughout the world in ways that researchers have yet to learn. The role of trees in climate change is complicated; experts contend that our leafy friends can both promote and protect against global warming. While scientists wrestle with these conundrums, however, temperatures worldwide continue to rise, as do the escalating numbers of natural disasters related to climate change.

Realistically, there are no quick and easy fixes. According to scientists, communities ought to prioritize learning how to adapt so that people can survive.

This means pumping more money into researching the causes, patterns and effects of climate change in order to develop better methods, models and tools to accurately predict and plan for its ongoing effects.
