

A Surreal Scientific Blunder

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Dr James Hansen is an advisor to Al Gore, a passionate advocate for controls on greenhouse gas emissions, and head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS); one of four institutions responsible for monitoring global temperatures. Last week, the institute published a monthly global temperature anomaly for October which was wrong. Contrary to expectations, the value for October of 0.88C indicated a lot of warming.

Two blogs, one run by US meteorologist Anthony Watts, and another by Canadian statistician Steve McIntyre, were quick to find one of the errors - many temperature records from Russia were not based on October readings at all, but rather figures for September that had simply been carried across. It is much colder in Russia in October than in September, as Napoleon found out to his cost back in 1812. <http://www.climateaudit.org/?p=4318>

The Institute admitted the blunder. However, when it published the correction it was evident Hansen's team, while adjusting down the temperatures for Russia, adjusted up the temperatures for Australia and the Canadian Arctic.

It appears that the Australian data was not in when GISS did the original analysis. According to Bill Kininmonth, formerly of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, it used to be normal practice for the Australian station summaries to be compiled in the National Climate Centre from field reports and sent as a block. Maybe the Melbourne Cup holiday meant the summary was late being dispatched. If that was the case, what was the basis for the first guess field that, in the absence of real data, became the real solution? Was it a mixture of last month's pattern and climatology?

I predict that in not so many years time weather station data will be collected more for fun, a sense of history, and for site-specific information, than for serious regional and global climate statistics. In the future, it will be data from satellites that is recognised as much more reliable for understanding regional and global temperature trends.

See the following link for more:

<http://jennifermarohasy.com/blog/2008/11/temperature-data-from-satellites-inconvenient-but-accurate/#more-3129>