



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on October 21, 2011

Has Climate Change Skepticism Been Debunked?

Researchers at the University of California claim they have conclusively proven the reality of global warming. The Berkeley Earth Surface Temperature (BEST) study analyzed more than 1.6 billion land temperature records dating back to the 1800s from more than 39,000 temperature stations around the world. Results show warming of nearly 1°C since 1950.



BEST researcher Dr. Robert Muller said his team discovered global temperatures have risen even more than the UN-accepted average of 0.64°C. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, he explained the purpose of the study was to investigate consequences of the urban heat island effect on reported surface temperatures. BEST found rural temperature records reveal a warming trend nearly identical to that of urban locations.

Muller asserts the new study debunks climate change skepticism accusing government agencies of cherry-picking urban temperature data. At issue is the extensive 2009 study by meteorologist Anthony Watts, [Is the U.S. Surface Temperature Record Reliable?](#) The report exposed gross rule violations at temperature recording station sites, revealing nearly 90 percent of U.S. locations "fail to meet the National Weather Service's own siting requirements that stations must be 30 meters or more away from an artificial heating or radiating/reflecting heat source." Watts described some of the shocking conditions:

We found stations located next to the exhaust fans of air conditioning units, surrounded by asphalt parking lots and roads, on blistering-hot roof-tops, and near sidewalks and buildings that absorb and radiate heat. We found 68 stations located at wastewater treatment plants, where the process of waste digestion causes temperatures to be higher than in surrounding areas.

Watts went on to report other problems such as faulty technology in use at the stations, the use of erroneous data to fill in major gaps in temperature records, and invalid statistical adjustments made by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The site violations and other problems plague both urban and rural stations.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has confirmed Watts' research. In August it published a critique, *Climate Monitoring: NOAA Can Improve Management of the U.S. Historical Climatology Network* ([USHCN](#)). GAO found NOAA chooses which data to report based on geographic distribution of USHCN stations without regard to whether they meet siting standards. The agency has no tracking method to monitor stations' adherence to rules and no policy in place to correct violations. Moreover, it includes stations with incomplete temperature records for the sake of maintaining an even geographic



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distribution.

Former NOAA research scientist Dr. Roger Pielke warns the data BEST used in its analysis is likely skewed as well. In a response to BEST author Judith Curry on her [blog](#), he pointed out warming would be an expected result if her team used the same raw data sets as those from USHCN and other major temperature reporting agencies worldwide. Pielke was one of 17 scientists who published an article in the [Journal of Geophysical Research](#) (2007) revealing that 90 to 95 percent of the "raw surface temperature data from which all of the different global surface temperature trend analyses are derived are essentially the same."

The most important point regarding the BEST study is one that Muller dismissively mentions at the end of his WSJ article: "How much of the warming is due to humans and what will be the likely effects? We made no independent assessment of that." But, he pontificates, "Global warming is real. Perhaps our results will help cool this portion of the climate debate."

His comments are deceptive. Few scientists deny global warming, and most (including the beach-going family above!) are very glad Earth has thawed from the Little Ice Age of the early 19th century. What they deny is *anthropogenic* global warming — the idea that human activities are driving catastrophic climate change. Since Muller admits his team "made no independent assessment of that," it seems his case against global warming skepticism has gone cold.



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