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# Warmest year? It's not the heat, it's the trend

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**Mike Lafferty**

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The ferry service to South Bass Island is churning through ice-free Lake Erie. Even Moscow, the one in Russia, warmed yesterday to a balmy minus 7.

Scientists announced yesterday that 2005 was the warmest year on record, and the trend is continuing this year, which has set alarm bells ringing. Last year nosed out 1998, according to a report from NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, which blamed greenhouse gases for the warmer worldwide average air temperature.

"We've had this string of very warm years; the warmest part has been in the 1990s and now into this new millennium," said David Bromwich, a scientist at the Byrd Polar Research Center at Ohio State University.

This is a contest of whiskers in which small annual increments add up. During the past century, global surface temperatures have increased about 1.1 degrees Fahrenheit, although the rate since 1976 has been three times as large.

Ohio has had a yo-yo winter. A warm November turned into a cold December followed by a rebound in temperatures this month. A January thaw arrived and hasn't left.

Ferry service on Lake Erie, which was halted in early December, resumed for the last half of the month when the lake refused to freeze. That gave usually isolated islanders a chance to visit the mainland.

"It was a little extra bonus to have the ferry running in January, definitely a strange feeling," said Stephanie Thompson, who works at Tippers Restaurant, one of the few island businesses that remain open yearround.

Scientist James Hansen, lead author of the Goddard study, said the warming coincides with rapid growth of greenhouse gases from human activity. The global average surface temperature in 2005 was about 58.3 degrees, he said.

"The observed rapid warming thus gives urgency to discussions about how to slow greenhouse gas emissions," Hansen said in the report.

Polar ice cores show there is more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than at any time in the past 800,000 years, probably longer, said Ellen Mosley-Thompson, a expert on ancient climates at the Byrd Center.

Although climate varies over decades and centuries, the effects of greenhouse gases are being added to natural climate variability. But, since the 1980s, that climate-change signal has been getting stronger, Bromwich said.

Even with overall global warming, some regions are warmer and some colder on a year-to-year basis. While the South Bass Island ferry has been running, Russia and the rest of Europe have been locked in a deep freeze the past week.

Still, the average Muscovite probably will take yesterday's minus 7 over Thursday's reading — a much cooler minus 24.

Information from the Associated Press was included in this story.

[mlafferty@dispatch.com](mailto:mlafferty@dispatch.com)

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