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Doubling Down on Climate Change Denial

By Phil Plait | Posted Monday, Dec. 3, 2012, at 8:00 AM ET

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Oh, those wacky professional climate change deniers! Once again, they've banded together a passel of people, 90 percent of whom aren't even climatologists, and had them sign a [nearly fact-free opinion piece](#) in the *Financial Post*, claiming global warming isn't real. It's an astonishing example of nonsense so ridiculous I would run out of synonyms for "bilge" before adequately describing it.

The Op-Ed is directed to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who has recently, and thankfully, been vocal about the looming environmental catastrophe of global warming. The deniers' letter takes him to task for this, but doesn't come within a glancing blow of reality.

The letter itself is based on a single claim. So let's be clear: If that claim is wrong, so is the rest of the letter.

Guess what? *That claim is wrong*. So blatantly wrong, in fact, it's hard to imagine anyone could write it with a straight face. It says:

"The U.K. Met Office recently released data showing that there has been no statistically significant global warming for almost 16 years."

This is simply, completely, and utterly false. The Met Office is the national weather service for the United Kingdom. In October 2012, they updated their database of global surface temperature measurements, a compendium of temperatures taken over time by weather stations around the planet. David Rose, a climate change denier [who can charitably be said to have trouble with facts](#), cherry-picked this dataset and [published a horrendously misleading graph](#) in that bastion of scientific thought, the *Daily Mail*, saying the measurements show there's been no global warming for the past 16 years.

But he did this by choosing a starting point on his graph that gave the result he wanted, a graph that looks like there's been no warming since 1997. But if you show the data properly, you see there *has* been warming:



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[Phil Plait](#), the creator of *Bad Astronomy*, is an astronomer, lecturer, and author. After ten years working on Hubble Space Telescope data and six more working on astronomy education, he struck out on his own as a writer. His two books are *Bad Astronomy: Misconceptions and Misuses Revealed, from Astrology to the Moon Landing "Hoax" and Death from the Skies!* [These Are the Ways the Universe Will End](#). He has also written dozens of magazine articles and 12 bazillion blog articles. He is a skeptic and fights the abuse of science, but his true love is praising the wonders of real science.



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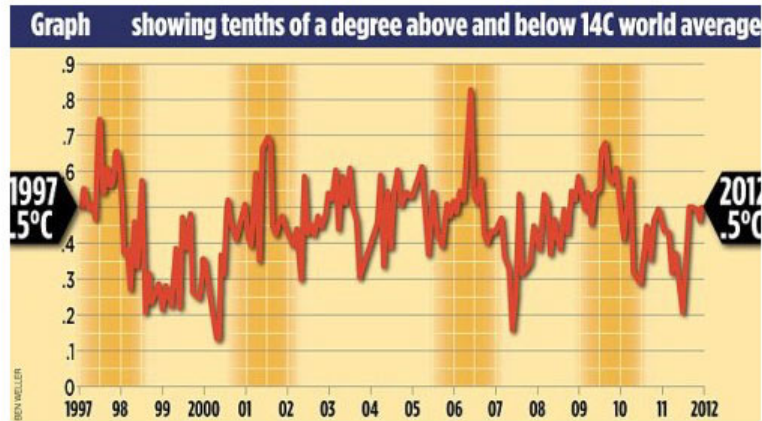


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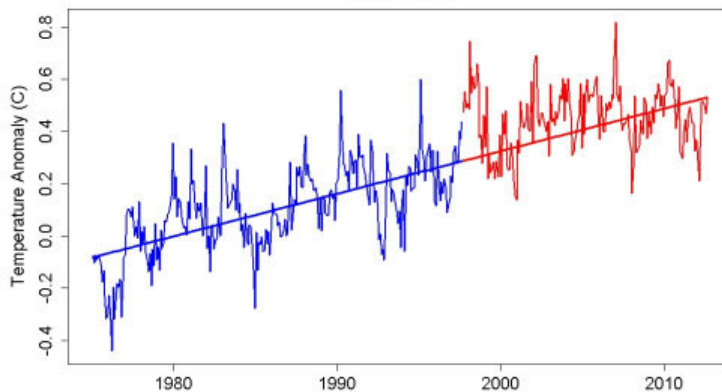


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Not this...



This.



Global surface temperatures from the Met Office data. Top: Fiction. Bottom: Fact.
Image credit: [David Rose/Daily Mail](#) (top), [Tamino](#) (bottom).

The top graph is from Rose's article, but the bottom graph shows what happens when you display the data going back a few more years. See the difference? What he did is like measuring how tall you are when you're 25, doing it again when you're 30, then claiming human beings never grow. That's a big no-no in science. You have to choose starting and ending points that fairly represent the data, as in the bottom graph. When you do, you very clearly see the trend that the Earth is getting warmer. In fact, hammering home how patently ridiculous this claim is, [nine of the 10 hottest years on record have been since 2000](#). On top of that, Rose was using global surface temperatures, which don't really represent global overall heat content well; most of the heating is going into ocean waters. So the data he's displaying so awfully isn't even the right data to make his claim anyway!

So *the very first basis* of this denial letter is total garbage, and was such an egregious manipulation of the U.K. Met Office data that [the Met Office itself issued a debunking of it!](#) Yet here we are, months later, with the deniers still ignoring facts.

The letter is chock full of more such falsehoods. If you want the rundown, please go read [the great article on Skeptical Science](#) destroying this nonsense. Full disclosure: I had already written quite a bit more for this post before seeing the one at Skeptical Science, and decided it would be better to send readers there for more rather than debunk all the wrongness here. I'm pleased to note they found the same examples of misleading or outright false statements in the deniers' article and debunked them the same way I had.

I do want to add something, though. I'll note that it seems superficially impressive that they got 125 scientists, "qualified in climate-related matters" as they claim, to sign this letter.

Yeah, about that...

First, not everyone signing that letter is a scientist. Lord Monckton, for example, apparently [has no formal scientific training](#), [has some trouble with the truth](#), and oh, by the way, [claims Obama's birth certificate is a forgery](#). He's the *last* guy I'd want signing a letter I was on. Yet he seems to pop up on every denialist list as a go-to guy.

Here's another: The very first signatory, Hhabibullo Abdusamatov, [claims that global warming is caused by the Sun](#), which is patently and provably false (see that Skeptical Science link for more). Many of the claims Abdusamatov makes (as listed on his Wikipedia page) are, um, not accepted by mainstream science, to be very charitable.

Going down the list of signatories I was struck by how many are *not*, in fact, climate scientists (again, for examples with references, see [Skeptical Science](#)); I counted a dozen who actually have climatology in their listed credentials. It's kinda weird to write such a big letter and then only have fewer than 10 percent of the signers actually be credentialed in the field.

Of course, I'm not a climatologist either, though I *am* an astronomer classically trained in science, and that means I know enough to rely on the combined research of actual climate scientists from around the world. And when thousands upon thousands of such scientists— in fact, [98 percent of actual, bona fide climate scientists](#)—say global warming is real, well then, that strikes me as being somewhat more credible than a hundred or so politically and ideologically driven non-climate-scientists.

I'll note this isn't the first time a laughably-wrong article has been printed by right-leaning venues and signed by multiple, similarly-inappropriate authors. [The Wall Street Journal](#) posted one in January 2012 (while turning down [an article supporting the reality of global warming](#) signed by 255 actual scientists), and in April 2012, [another made the rounds](#) that was signed by 49 people, including some ex-NASA astronauts, but again, [none who actually were climate scientists](#).

So we can expect to see more of this. Clearly, when you don't have facts to support your claims, the best thing to do is make as much noise as possible to distract from reality. And that reality is that the world is getting hotter, and unless we do something, now, [we're facing a world of trouble](#).

Tip o' the poison pen to reddit.

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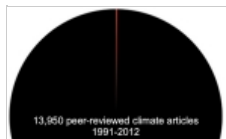
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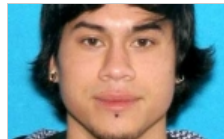
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