

## **Flashback 1971, burning coal will cause ice age**

By Michael Bastasch, 7 April 2015

Flashback 1971: Scientists predict burning coal will cause the next ice age.

The world is on the verge of another ice age. Well, at least that's what scientists told us in the 1970s: burning fossil fuels like coal would cause the world to plunge into another ice age in the 21st Century.

### **50 or 60 years away from a disastrous new ice age**

"The world could be as little as 50 or 60 years away from a disastrous new ice age, a leading atmospheric scientist predicts," the Washington Post reported on July 9, 1971, quoting Dr. S. I. Rasool of NASA and Columbia University.

According to Rasool, fine dust from fossil fuel use would block out so much sunlight that the Earth's "average temperature could drop by six degrees." Rasool added that "such a temperature increase could be sufficient to trigger an ice age!"

Basically, pollutants from burning coal and other fuels tend to reflect solar energy back into space. Scientists were worried that such man-made aerosols would block out so much sunlight that global temperatures would drop — just like how volcanoes can cause some atmospheric cooling.

### **Fossil fuel-driven cooling**

Worry among the scientific community was apparently so strong that Gordon MacDonald, President Nixon's science advisor, said that fossil fuel-driven cooling was "one of the serious problems" facing the world. MacDonald added that Rasool's predictions were "consistent with estimates I and others have made."

So what "solution" to global cooling did scientists come up with? Banning fossil fuel use. The Post reported that scientists wanted mankind to stop using coal, gas and oil and start using nuclear power — pollution controls just weren't enough, according to the Post.

Scientists, of course, have changed their tune since the 1970s, saying that fossil fuels are causing global warming, not cooling. While aerosols from fossil fuels do have a slight cooling effect (the extent of which is being debated), scientists say carbon dioxide emissions are trapping heat and warming the world.

### **Same solutions scientists push to fight global cooling and warming**

Oddly enough, the solutions scientists pushed to fight global cooling and warming are the same: ban fossil fuels and use low-carbon energy. The only difference from the 1970s is that, today, politicians are pushing green energy from solar and wind, not nuclear power.

But even in the 1970s there was a debate over whether or not human activities were cooling or warming the globe. Scientists who argued the globe was warming won out, culminating in the

testimony of NASA scientist James Hansen who testified before Congress in 1986 that carbon dioxide would warm the planet 2 to 4 degrees by 2010.