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New Report: Temperatures in Alaska on the Rise

Anchorage, Alaska—The average temperature in 2006 for Anchorage was are part of a broader warming trend since 2000. Between 2000 and 2006, the average temperature was 2.1°F above the 30-year average in Anchorage according to a new report released today by AkPIRG. AkPIRG said this warmer-than-normal weather is indicative of what Alaska can expect with continued global warming.

“Throw out the record books, because global warming is raising temperatures in Alaska and across the country,” said AkPIRG Campaign Director Kelci Barnes. “The long-term forecast is for more of the same unless we quickly and significantly reduce global warming pollution from power plants and passenger vehicles,” continued Barnes.

According to the National Climatic Data Center, the 2006 summer and 2006 overall were the second warmest on record for the lower 48 states. 2007 is on track to be the second warmest year on record globally.

To examine recent temperature patterns in the United States, AkPIRG compared temperature data for the years 2000-2006 from 255 weather stations located in all 50 states and Washington, DC with temperatures averaged over the 30 years spanning 1971-2000, or what scientists call the “normal” temperature.

Key findings for Alaska include:

- In 2006, Barrow experienced average maximum temperatures — the highest temperatures recorded on a given day — of 3°F above normal.
- Talkeetna experienced average minimum temperatures — the lowest temperatures recorded on a given day, usually at night — of 1.3°F above normal in 2006. And between 2000 and 2006, the average minimum temperatures in Talkeetna were 4.6°F above normal..
- Anchorage’s average temperatures in 2006 are part of a broader warming trend since 2000. Between 2000 and 2006, the average temperature was 2.1°F above the 30-year average in Anchorage. Nationally, the average temperature during this seven year period was at least 0.5°F above normal at 87% of the locations studied.

In April 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that North America could experience significant water stress, forest fires, and “an increased number, intensity, and duration of heat waves” as temperatures continue to rise.

“Scientists are sounding alarm bells about the impacts of continued global warming,” stated Barnes “The good news is that those same scientists say we can avoid the worst effects of global warming by taking bold action now to reduce global warming pollution,” continued Barnes.

To avoid the worst consequences of global warming, the United States must halt increases in global warming emissions now, cut emissions by at least 15-20% by 2020, and slash emissions by at least 80% by 2050.

“The better news is that we have the technology at our fingertips to cut global warming pollution and forge a cleaner, more secure energy future,” said Barnes.

The United States could substantially reduce its global warming pollution by using existing technologies to make power plants, businesses, homes, and cars more efficient and generate more electricity from clean, renewable sources, such as wind and solar power.

Congress is poised to consider global warming legislation this fall. The Safe Climate Act in the U.S. House and the Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act in the U.S. Senate are the only bills that would reduce pollution to levels that scientists say are needed to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

“The heat is on Congress to take decisive action to curb global warming,” stated Barnes. “AkPIRG commends Senator Stevens and Senator Murkowski for recognizing this and co-sponsoring S.1766 the Low Carbon Economy Act. We also call on them to take even greater steps to reduce global warming pollution by supporting the Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act. . They cannot settle for less,” concluded Barnes.

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AkPIRG is a statewide, citizen-based public interest advocacy organization.