Last Week's Surface Temperature vs. This Week's Precipitation Rates

Kaylin Zheng and Eliza Hoelzle

Ottawa Hills High School

THE GLOBE PROGRAM
Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment

Abstract

How can surface temperature affect precipitation, and what would that mean for our warming planet? When temperatures rise, it increases evaporation, which in turn creates more precipitation. This was the basis for our hypothesis that as surface temperature rises, so will precipitation. We collected surface temperature on turf, grass, and asphalt using an Etekcity infrared thermometer. We used a ruler to measure the amount of precipitation, and after creating two graphs we found that our hypothesis was incorrect. Our data suggested that as temperatures dropped, precipitation increased. Based on other studies we found with similar procedures, we concluded that one of our main sources of error was our small sample size, with only one day we recorded containing precipitation. Throughout our experiment, we learned many things about climate change and how it could affect major weather events such as hurricanes and floods and are excited to see what studies like ours could uncover in the future.

Research Question

Our research question was: whether last week's surface temperature would affect next week's precipitation and what does this mean for the future of climate change?

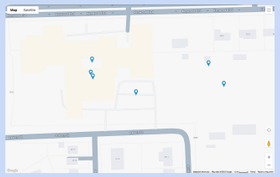
Introduction

Since 1850, Earth's temperature has risen a whopping two degrees Fahrenheit, averaging about 0.11° Fahrenheit per decade. (Lindsey & Dahlman, 2024). Alongside concerning temperature levels, precipitation levels of the Earth have been increasing, with the United States having record precipitation rates since 2019. But is there any correlation between these two rapidly changing environmental factors? It has been proved that there can be up to a 4% increase in precipitation per 1° Fahrenheit rise. (National Centers for Environmental Information, 2020). This resulted in the rising question of whether last week's surface temperature would affect next week's precipitation and what this means for the future of climate change. If the surface temperature is higher for one week, then the next week will have more precipitation because the higher temps will result in more evaporation. (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2024) This would result in higher temperatures overall and could lead to increased natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes. As the climate changes, panic rises throughout, due to the escalating numbers of natural occurring disasters. Ice jams, rapid snowmelts, and persistent heavy rainfall stemming from heightened temperatures are followed by river flooding, more specifically in the Missouri, Mississippi Plate, and Arkansas rivers. The adjusting climate also warms the oceans and causes rising sea levels. While this occurs, hurricanes and typhoons become stronger and catastrophic. Recent studies have shown, "Helene was by far the deadliest inland hurricane on record, exceeding Hurricane Agnes in 1972, which killed 128 people in the northeastern U.S. And it was the third deadliest in the continental U.S.

Research Methods

- Our study site was Ottawa Hills High School in Toledo, OH. We tested the parking lot, the stadium turf, and the grass between the parking lot and the turf.
- The Globe protocols we used were: Surface Temperature and Precipitation

For our experiment, we took nine data points from nine different days. We used Globe to collect our data and share it with the world. The Globe protocols we used were surface temperature and precipitation. To increase the accuracy of our surface temperature data, we took temperatures from three different surfaces, asphalt, turf, and grass. The thermometers we used were Etekcity infrared thermometers, and they used lasers to get temperatures without touching the ground, which was very helpful in our data collection. For precipitation, we counted in millimeters and used estimates for unmeasurable spots. The estimates we used were trace, less than 10 millimeters, and measurable, more than ten millimeters. These methods of data collection were easy yet accurate, allowing us to gather a sufficient amount of data points. We recorded our data in data sheets that we made beforehand to give us organized and reliable information. The website we used, Globe, allowed us to share our findings with the world, while also giving us the resources to look at other people's data from the same protocols and location, furthering our data points and allowing us to give more accurate results. After we analyzed our data, we connected our data with research that we have gathered on the cause and effect of surface temperature and precipitation on climate change.

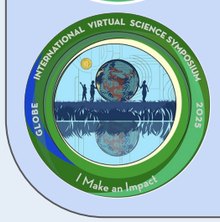


Student Researcher

We have earned the student research badge by being students and conducting research for GLOBE.

Data Scientist

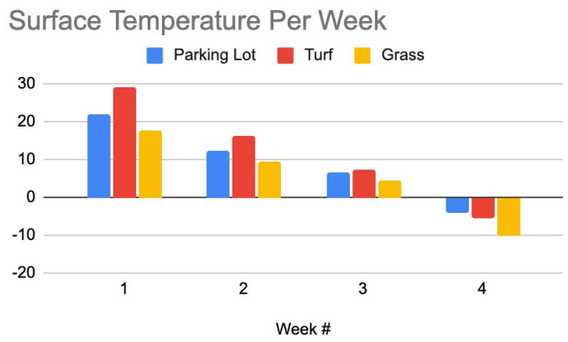
We have earned the data scientist badge by conducting research and collecting data using GLOBE protocols.

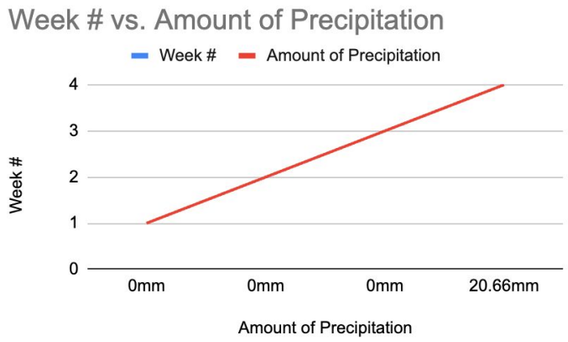


I Make An Impact

We have earned the I Make an Impact badge by conducting research that .

Results





- The first graph, titled "Surface Temperature Per Week," shows the surface temperatures of three different surfaces: parking lot, turf, and grass, over four weeks.
- The second graph shows the amount of precipitation recorded over the weeks. The data reveals no precipitation was observed in weeks 1 through 3, but a substantial increase (20.66 mm) occurred in week 4.

This sharp increase in precipitation coincides with the notable decrease in surface temperatures in the first graph, suggesting a possible correlation between increased rainfall and cooling of the surfaces. This relationship highlights the impact of precipitation on temperature reduction, especially in outdoor environments

Discussion

If the project was to be repeated, we would have made many changes. Most importantly, we would have had a bigger sample size to increase the accuracy of our results. With environmental projects, it can be hard to gather data because of the unpredictability of nature. There were no guarantees that we could collect the data we needed to create a conclusion we were confident about. But, this research and research from projects like it are very important, especially in the coming years. As our planet warms, we need to think of other environmental impacts global warming can have. While many people think of droughts, it is important to think about other major weather events that can be caused by global warming. Throughout this project, we have tried to look at a facet of climate change that we feel isn't recognized as a danger. And with more severe weather every year such as hurricanes and floods, we believe it is critical to keep testing hypotheses like ours so we can try to find a solution. If this project were to be repeated, we would suggest a larger sample size, consistent testing days, and a larger area for testing.

Conclusion

Our hypothesis that if surface temperature increases, so will precipitation, was proven false by our results. By collecting data outside with thermometers and ruler, we were able to make two graphs, a graph showing surface temperature decreasing over time, and a graph showing precipitation increasing over time. By comparing these two graphs, we saw the inverse relationship of surface temperature and precipitation, whereas surface temperature decreases, precipitation increases. The results we expected and our hypothesis were based on one main study from the National Centers for Environmental Information, which concluded that there can be up to a 4% increase in precipitation per 1° Fahrenheit rise in temperature. Although we didn't get the results we expected, we believe our project was still an important topic to test especially when related to climate change.

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