

# HOW HEARST'S 'WEATHER WONKS' OBSCURE THE CLIMATE CRISIS 2

Hearst Newspapers' 'science-informed' weather reporting initiative promised to help keep readers safe when it lifted off in 2023. But the 'Texas Weather Wonks' have entirely ignored the primary driver of recent extreme heat—human fossil-fueled industry.

By Greg Harman Deceleration News

The planet is on fire. Fossil fuels are the torch. People are dying from the heat. And much worse is on the way unless rapid, concerted action is taken to reduce global emissions at the root of the crisis. In terms of weather stories, there is none bigger than the impact of the climate crisis driving extreme weather events around the planet.

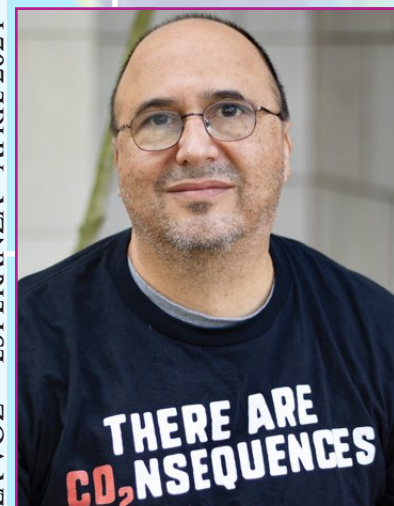
That is the consistent message of the nation's leading climate scientists and federal agencies.

Given that, there's an expectation of our journalists and editors to get this story right so that readers can safeguard their lives and their collective future—including providing a habitable Earth for the generations to follow.

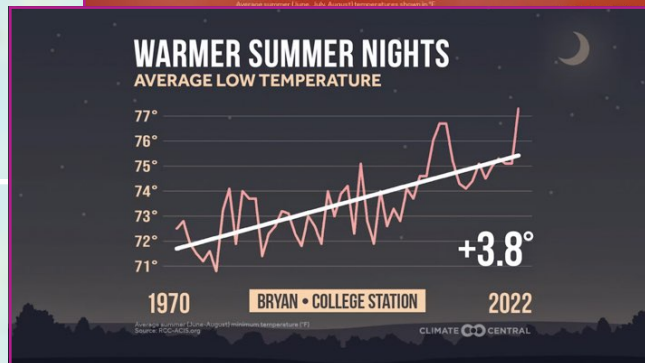
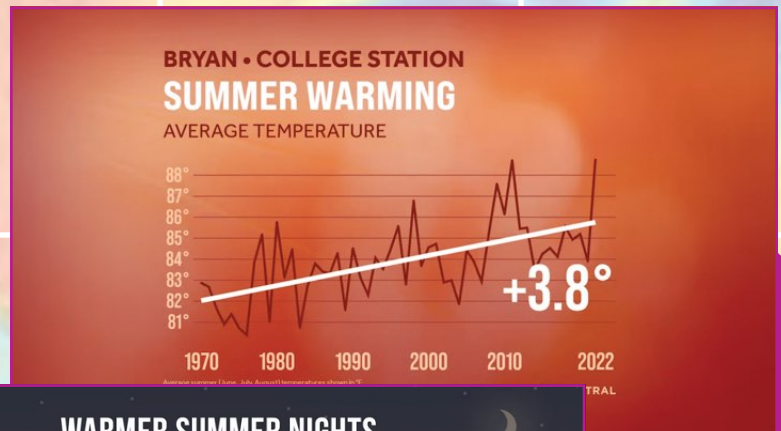
"If you're talking about high temperatures today without talking about climate change's contribution, that's journalistic malpractice," Texas A&M climate scientist Andrew Dessler told Deceleration.

Yet readers in greater San Antonio and Houston would be hard-pressed to find any of these startling but simple facts in eight months of offerings from a new Hearst Newspapers initiative whose stated mission is to provide actionable intelligence about weather events to help keep readers safe.

The "Texas Weather Wonks," launched in the unprecedented summer heat of 2023 that claimed hundreds of lives around the state, delivering weather updates multiple times every week to readers of the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News. Their trained meteorologists tally over and over again the extreme heat records falling, offering short- and medium-range forecasts, purport to point to the key causes of that heat—all while studi-



Texas A&M climate scientist, Andrew Dessler



Climate Central graphics used at KBTCX Climate Central graphics used at KBTCX

ously ignoring the climate science and published studies point-

ing us back to industry's polluting behaviors as the primary driver of all this extra heat.

Announcing 2023 as the hottest year on record, NASA officials were unequivocal:

"Scientific observations and analyses ... have shown this warming has been driven primarily by human-caused greenhouse gas emissions."

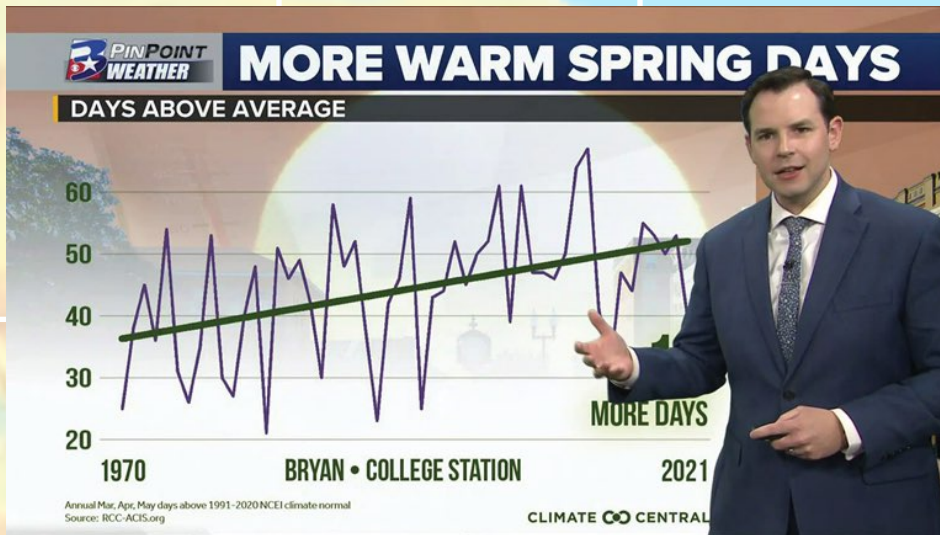
That remains true today, a NOAA spokesperson confirmed, as the explanation for January ranking as the hottest January on record and this February the hottest February ever measured on the planet.

So how is it that The Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News, with promises to bring "science-focused" journalism to their readers, have failed for eight months to accurately describe the main driver of all of this heat?

The Express-News meteorologist wrote about February's heat with a headline asking: "Should we be worried?" With no mention of climate change, fossil fuels, or the Earth's dangerous trajectory, Anthony Franze concluded, "While it may seem a bit early for such temperatures, nothing is actually wrong."

And our hottest summer ever?





Chief Meteorologist Shel Winkley at KBTCX in College Station, Texas

“We’re trying to save the world. I mean, that’s essentially what we’re doing by educating people on climate change.”

He’s joined in that mission by Chief Meteorologist Shel Winkley at KBTCX in College Station, Texas, who rightly attributed the scorching 2023 summer to “human-induced climate change.”

It’s a simple and scary fact that the Wonks have refused to share with their readers.

Deceleration passed along our key findings with editors at both the Houston Chronicle and the Express-News. We invited them to correct us if they took issue with our key findings. They chose not to respond.

The World Weather Attribution Project dropped a 21-page paper (and guide for journalists) that explained how climate change contributed to the extreme temperatures of July 2023 in North America, China, and Europe. They wrote that Texas’s extreme heat in July 2023 would have been “virtually impossible ... if humans had not warmed the planet by burning fossil fuels.”

Recall that Climate Central, a nonprofit news organization staffed by both meteorologists and science journalists, found in September of 2023 that in the 17 Texas cities researched, every one experienced extreme heat caused by global warming for at least half the summer that had been made at least two times more likely by human-caused warming.

How did the Wonks report it?

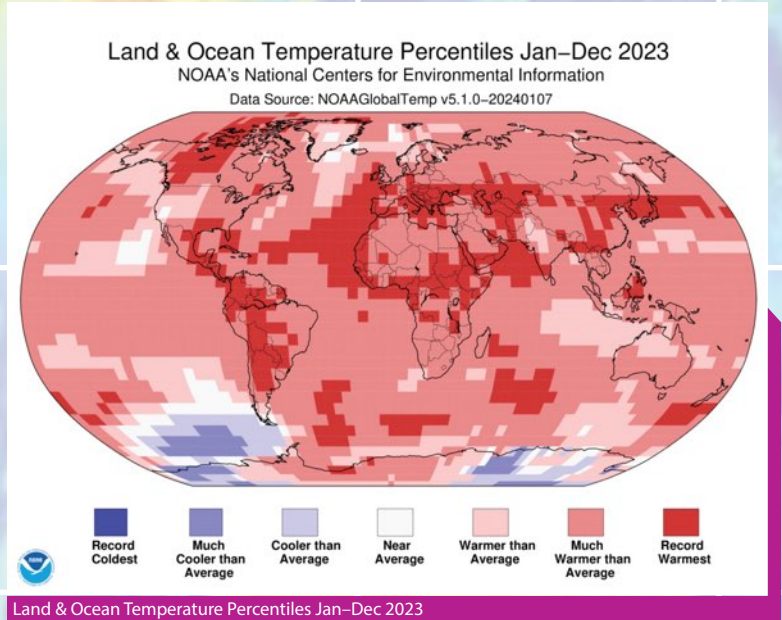
They delivered readers a thorough cataloguing of temperature records falling across the state.

What was behind those temps?

No comment.

Research by Yale Climate Connections found in 2022 a growing number of meteorologists integrating the climate message into their work. It probably helps that it’s impossible to accurately account for today’s weather without it.

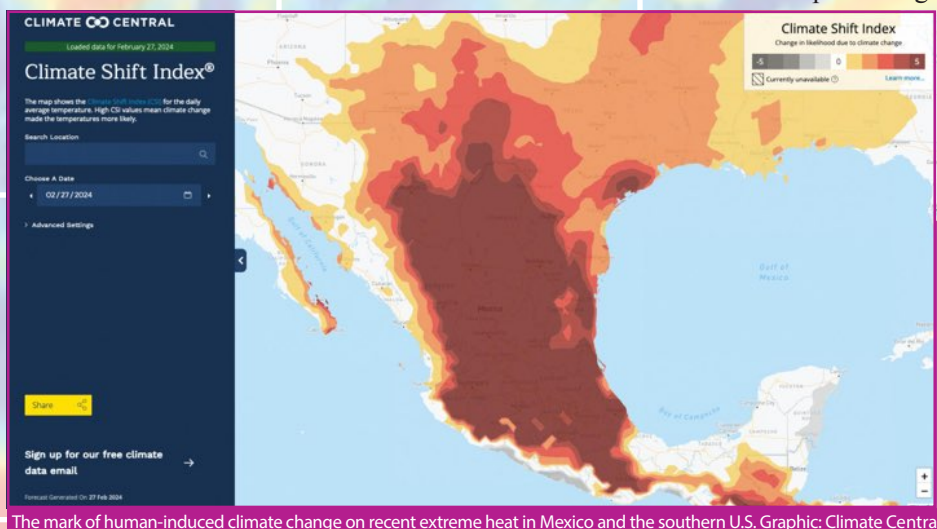
As Jeff Berardelli, chief meteorologist and climate specialist working at WFLA in Tampa Bay, Florida, has said:



All we can think is that if Hearst Newspapers is serious about protecting the communities they serve from extreme weather events (and wish to avoid the “malpractice” tag hanging out there or just write weather science accurately) they need to seriously reassess their mission and performance in covering what has been described by perhaps the world’s most famous naturalist as “the biggest threat to security that modern humans have ever faced.”

The world in all its utter beauty needs them to do better.

BIO: Greg Harman is founder & editor of *Deceleration.news*, an online journal of environmental justice based in San Antonio, Texas. <https://bit.ly/weather-wonks>



The mark of human-induced climate change on recent extreme heat in Mexico and the southern U.S. Graphic: Climate Central