

Blizzard Prompts Speculation Of Drastic Changes in Climate

THE blizzard that snowed under several states has fired up new speculations that "our climate may be changing."

A superficial collection of comments by weather experts, meteorologists and climatologists reveals opinions and forecasts on this topic that are as varied as the weather itself.

Weather is what we have from day to day, as measured in terms of temperature, wind velocity and precipitation. Climate is weather measured over a long period of time.

The trouble with making prognostications about future climate is the limited information we have on the past. Most scientists agree that warmer-cooler and wetter-drier cycles have occurred, but details are too skimpy for positive conclusions.

Scientific records of weather on a worldwide basis are a recent innovation. Only since satellites have been sent into orbit has weather information been obtainable regularly from some parts of the globe. It is incomplete.

National weather services were not established in the United States until 1870, and the number of reporting stations were few and far between. Virtually all weather data for North America have been obtained in this century, which does not provide a broad basis for analyzing longtime climate changes.

Nevertheless, weather experts are having a field day with warnings that something ominous may be about to happen. We might have to wait around a few hundred years to see it, but the implication is that we ought to worry about it now!

Fortune magazine reported that "in the last decade . . . a number of scientists from several disciplines have concluded that some fairly drastic climate change is going on."

None of the anticipated climate changes is suggested as an improvement. Changes are regarded as hazardous events for mankind, even though the present climate might not be exactly what is wanted. Ideal climatic conditions are not defined.

Some climatologists predict that polar ice may melt as the earth warms, inundating great seaports. Others say the cities won't be under water, but that we might have to move the grain belt several hundred miles to the north.

Another "ice age," with glaciers sliding across continents, is foreseen by those who believe the world is cooling. A few say deserts may shift to new areas, with sad effects.

The tilt of the earth, sunspots and meteor debris are among factors blamed for expected climatic changes. Environmentalists theorize that man-made ozone pollution is a cause.

A news magazine reported "Climatologists are pessimistic that political leaders will take positive action to compensate for the climatic changes, or even to allay their effects." This is one encouraging aspect of the diverse outlook.

There seems to be no doubt that both weather and climate always have been subject to variations, but it may be presumptuous to assume that the human race is either the cause of climatic changes or has the power to stop them.