

The record winter of 2007 / 2008

The winter of 2008 broke some records for snowfall and temperature allowing the climate contrarians to stand up and proclaim that global warming was a hoax one more time. We all know (well most of us do) that more extreme weather events are a natural part of weather on a warmer planet and that one cannot define climate from weather. But were these records really new records?

The National Climatic Data Center has recently completed an upgrade of their historic weather records for 268 critical weather stations across the lower 48. The recent cold weather records set across much of the upper midwest, turns out, are not records at all - far from it. For example, in the Minneapolis St. Paul / International Falls area, the new records date back to the early 1880s, adding some 30 or 40 years to the record length. Before the turn of the century was when it was cold across N. America relative to today. Low temperature records in the area then ranged from -44 F to -48 F. The coldest recorded official temperature for this spell of cold weather was -40 F at International Falls. In addition, climate scientist know and understand very well that extreme weather events will be more common with a warmer world. It's a part of the natural system - with a warmer average global temperature, the weather systems are more energetic, and therefore the possibility of extreme weather events is higher. This is being born out in academic papers around the world showing that the number of and frequency of extreme weather events is increasing with average global temperature.

Another thing about a warmer planet and more extreme weather events – those weather events, because they are born to a warmer climate, hold more moisture – giving us a possible explanation for the large snowfall accumulations seen this year.

The website of the NCDC where one can look at the new weather records is:
<http://threadex.rcc-acis.org/> Scroll down to your favorite weather station and compare the datasets!

From the NCDC January Summary:

January 2008 - Cooler and Wetter than Average in Western U.S., Warmer in Northeast 31st Warmest Globally

The contiguous U.S. temperature during January 2008 was near average, according to an analysis by NOAA's National Climatic Data Center in Asheville NC. Temperatures across much of the western U.S. were cooler than average, while temperatures were warmer than average in the Northeast, which had its 20th warmest January on record. An active pattern brought heavy rain and snow to the West and helped ease drought conditions in parts of the region, but 26% of the nation remained in some stage of drought. The global average surface temperature in January was the 31st warmest on record, based on preliminary data.

U.S. Temperature Highlights

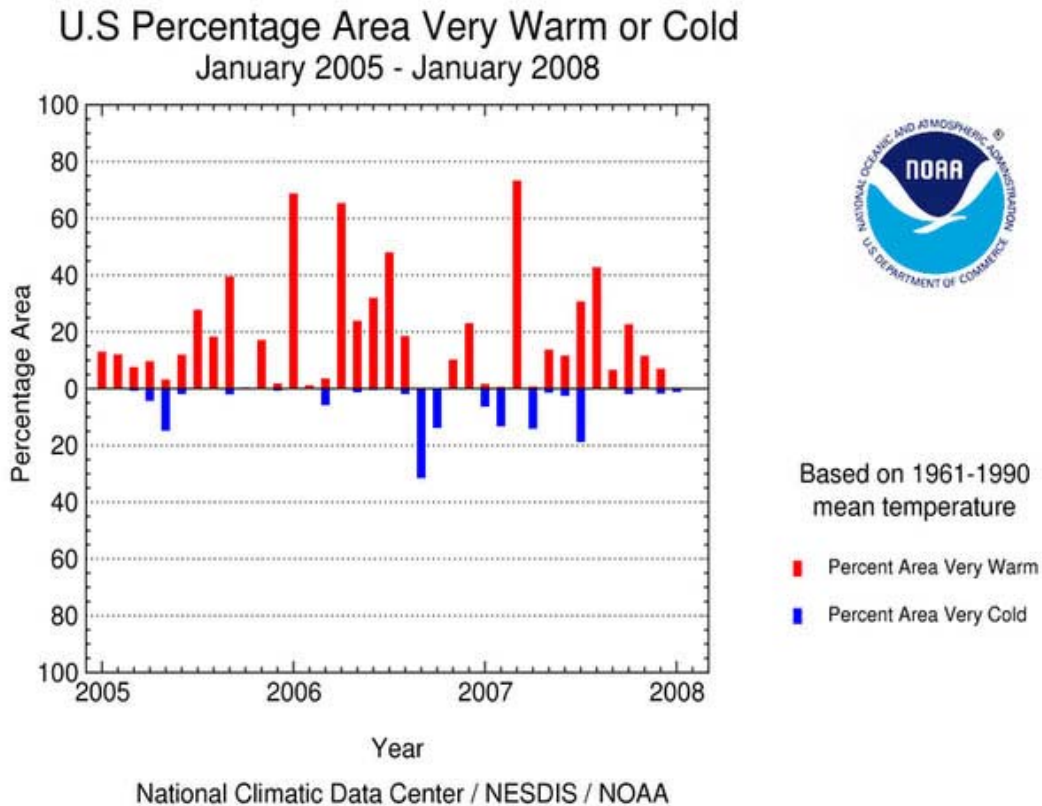
For the contiguous United States, the average temperature was 30.5°F (-0.83°C) for January, which was 0.3°F (0.2°C) below the 20th century mean and the 49th coolest January on record, based on preliminary data.

<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/2008/jan/global.html#introduction>

Temperature data is from the period 1880 to 2007, with mean temperature calculations determined from the 1961 to 1991 period. The 31st warmest global average January temp is in the top 24th percentile. The 49th coolest 48 contiguous January is in the top 38th percentile. Even though parts of the US were a fair amount cooler than normal, it didn't amount to much, and globally, the warm temperature U.S. anomaly was significantly more pronounced than the cool temp U.S. anomaly.

New York City, by mid February had only received a trace of snowfall, and much of the northeast saw temperatures significantly above normal.

There is a strong La Nino underway in the equatorial Pacific. This has a significant cooling effect on the planet.



What we actually saw in weather in January was that January was exactly normal, on average across the US.

Conclusion: Even given the big winter weather records set across the globe this year – on average, globally, as per the NCDCs record of the January being the 31st warmest January on record, January was in the top ¼ of warm January's ever recorded.