US roasts to hottest year on record by a landslide

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
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WASHINGTON – America set an off-the-harts heat record in 2012. A brutal combination of widespread drought and mostly absent winter ushed the average an-ual U.S. temperature last ear up to 55.32 degrees ahrenheit, the govern-ent announced Tues-ay. That's a full degree armer than the old cord set in 1998. Breaking temperature cords by an entire gree is unprecedented, ientists say. Normally, records are broken by a tenth of a degree or so.

"It was off the chart," said Deke Arndt, head of climate monitoring at the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., which calculated the temperature records.

Last year, he said, will go down as "a huge exclamation point at the end of a couple decades of warming."

The data center's figures for the entire world won't come out until next week, but through the first 11 months of 2012, the world was on pace to have its eighth warmest year on record.

Scientists say the U.S. heat is part global warming in action and natural weather variations. The drought that struck almost two-thirds of the nation and a La Nina weather event helped push temperatures higher, along with climate change from man-made greenhouse gas emissions, said Katharine Hayhoe, director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University. She said temperature increases are happening faster than scientists predicted.



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In this Aug. 16, 2012, file photo, dust is carried by the wind behind a combine harvesting corn in a field near Coy, Ark. A brutal combination of a widespread drought and a mostly absent winter pushed the average annual U.S. temperature last year up to 55.32 degrees Fahrenheit, the government announced Tuesday.