Some areas, like the Gulf of Mexico, tend to dry out. In general, ENSOs and La Niñas affect these regions in opposite manners.

At last week's meeting of the American Meteorological Society in Anaheim, Calif., Ropelewski reported the current La Niña seems to be progressing true to form. By mid-1988, water temperatures in the central Pacific had plummeted to abnormally cold levels, signaling a climate swing directly from an El Niño into a La Niña. Such a pattern does not always occur. For instance, two ENSOs developed between 1976 and 1984, but no La Niña split the two warm phases.

As expected during a La Niña, strong monsoons pounded India and Bangladesh last summer. Then, in December, heavy rains visited Australia, repeating the pattern of most La Niñas, Ropelewski says. Even weather in Alaska seems in character. The bitter cold felt in this region during recent weeks follows the statistical La Niña temperature pattern for the area.

Jones says the La Niña has already started to cool ocean temperatures, but land temperatures have not yet followed. He says the average global temperature for 1989 should drop from this year's high, although he still expects it to exceed the 30-year mean. Climatologists are laboring to determine if this background warming is indeed caused by the greenhouse effect, or by some unknown natural climate shift. The natural variation could be analogous to something like a century-long version of the ENSO.

— R. Monastersky

Spill threatens research

Diesel fuel leaking from a wrecked Argentine ship threatens biological research at the U.S. Palmer Research Station on the Antarctic Peninsula, says Ted DeLaca, head of the National Science Foundation's polar science section.

The 435-foot-long *Bahía Paraíso* started leaking fuel and partially sank after underwater rocks ripped a 30-foot-long gash in its hull on Jan. 29. Primarily a supply vessel for Argentine bases, the ship carried 81 tourists and had just finished a sightseeing visit to the U.S. station. It was within 1.5 miles of the science installation when it was abandoned by passengers and crew.

The fuel slick has spread throughout the water near the station and has started to harm area wildlife. Washing up on shore are thousands of krill, which form the basis of the local food web. Penguins and other birds have also died.

DeLaca says it is not yet possible to gauge the impact of the spill on the nearly pristine Antarctic environment. He adds that the spill may affect animal populations for many years and could taint the results of future studies there. □

NIH finds scientific errors but no fraud

A National Institutes of Health (NIH) panel has cleared Nobel laureate David Baltimore and several colleagues of scientific fraud. But it did find "significant errors of misstatement and omission, as well as lapses in scientific judgment," according to a report released last week.

The three-member panel absolved the authors of any serious wrongdoing, but the issue seems unlikely to subside. Critics still harbor doubts about the research, and powerful members of Congress have taken on this episode and the issue of scientific fraud in general with a vengeance. The entire affair has forced scientists to reexamine their system of monitoring error and outright fraud.

The controversy centers on a scientific paper published in the April 25, 1986 CELL by a team of researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Mass. Baltimore, director of the Whitehead Institute, has taken much of the heat, along with coauthor Thereza Imanishi-Kari, formerly at MIT and now at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. The research in question involved the insertion of foreign genes into mice and the effect on the animals' immune systems.

Allegations of scientific error began when Margot O'Toole, a postdoctoral scientist working under Imanishi-Kari, began suspecting serious flaws in the research method. O'Toole spoke up, but Imanishi-Kari dismissed her concerns. O'Toole says she would have let the matter drop, but another junior researcher alerted Walter Stewart and Ned Feder, two NIH researchers who serve as unofficial watchdogs of scientific misconduct. Stewart and Feder found evidence suggesting the Boston team's data failed to support its conclusions. Baltimore and his colleagues called for an officially sanctioned NIH review. NIH Director James B. Wyngaarden complied last year, appointing three outside scientists to investigate.

The panel interviewed the researchers as well as O'Toole and others involved in the dispute. They found factual and clerical errors in the data and problems with a reagent that could have skewed conclusions. The panel recommended the team send a correction letter to CELL. Baltimore and his colleagues say they've already done that in a Nov. 18 letter to the journal, but the panel maintains that letter doesn't go far enough.

On balance, Baltimore and colleagues profess satisfaction with the NIH report. "I feel vindicated," Baltimore said in a prepared statement issued after the report's release. "The document supports my original judgment that this research work would be a significant contribution to the literature."

O'Toole and others contend the report brushed aside evidence of significant scientific error. "The panel's report is laced with equivocal and evasive phrases," O'Toole wrote in a comment letter to NIH. She called the report an "inadequate scientific analysis of the facts."

The whole controversy may end up in Washington again. Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has held hearings on the "Baltimore paper" in the past. "We may have Mr. Baltimore and the NIH before the committee to discuss [the report] in greater detail," Dingell says.

— K.A. Fackelmann

Panel steps up cancer war

The National Cancer Advisory Board, a presidentially appointed panel advising the National Cancer Institute, wants tobacco regulated as a drug. This is one of a series of recommendations it issued this week aimed at cutting the U.S. cancer death rate in half by the year 2000.

Eliminating smoking tops the board's list of prevention recommendations. Smoking accounts for 30 percent of all U.S. cancer deaths, including 87 percent of all lung cancer deaths, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. The advisory panel supports a smoking ban on all airline flights and asks Congress to classify tobacco as a drug, putting it under the regulatory aegis of the Food and Drug Administration. Special efforts should be made to deter children from smoking or chewing tobacco, the panel says, noting that 100,000 kids under 12 use tobacco.

Screening tests for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer should be readily available, says the panel. In particular, it notes, widespread use of mammography among women aged 40 and older could reduce breast cancer deaths by 50 percent. Yet many physicians do not routinely suggest mammography to patients at risk of breast cancer, the group says.

The panel urges schools, state and local governments, and even employers to help in the battle against cancer. But it also calls on individuals to adopt a healthier lifestyle, recommending that people reduce their fat intake to 30 percent of daily calories or less and get more fiber by eating fruits, vegetables and grains.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States, and is expected to kill about 502,000 people in 1989, according to the American Cancer Society. □

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