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Record warm intensified in early 1998

WASHINGTON, June 8 -- After the past several years of record warm temperatures worldwide, the first several months of 1998 brought some of the warmest U.S. temperatures ever on record, the federal government announced. The data was collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and announced by Vice President Al Gore, who said some of this year's warming could be attributed to the cyclical El Nino patterns. But, Gore said, the overall trend found by NOAA 'is a reminder once again that global warming is real, and that unless we act, we can expect more extreme weather in the years ahead.' He cited such events as record levels of precipitation, record deaths from tornadoes, damage to coral reefs from the Florida Keys to Australia, and wildfires in Malaysia, Brazil and Mexico. Gore announced the NOAA findings as a means of increasing pressure on Congress to approve President Clinton's budget request for \$6.3 billion over five years for tax and research incentives to promote more energy- efficient products and technologies. Gore insisted U.S. industry had the expertise and ability to make affordable changes to combat global warming, saying, 'We can do that. We know how to do that.'

Worldwide average temperatures in the 1980s and the 1990s have been the highest on record, and the Earth's average surface temperature last year of some 62 degrees Fahrenheit represented the highest level ever recorded.

Federal researchers said new temperature records were set in five states in the first five months of 1998, with the average global surface temperature running 1.76 degrees above the average of 61.7 degrees for the benchmark period 1961-1990. Part of this year's warming was attributed to El Nino, a cyclical warming of ocean temperatures in the Southern Pacific that occurs naturally every several years. But the NOAA report cited by Gore found that among the 10 strongest El Nino events of this century, they have become more frequent and warmer. Gore's office said in a statement, 'Although it is not clear that the increasing frequency and warmth of El Ninos is a direct result of global warming, the analysis suggests that the effects of El Nino are compounded by rising global temperatures.' ---