

**October 10, 2014**

Contact: Peter Thorne

319-335-4414

Yogi Shah

515-201-6234

David Courard-Hauri

515-868-1707

Joe Bolkcom 319-330-9541

**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

## **LEADING IOWA SCIENTISTS: “Climate Change Hurting Iowans’ Health”**

(Des Moines) Iowans are experiencing real impacts from climate change, including heavier rains and increased flooding. Human health effects from climate change are just as real and are already being felt in Iowa, according to a statement released today by statewide group of 180 Iowa scientists.

“Climate change is negatively impacting our water quality, increasing exposures to allergens and air pollutants, introducing new infectious diseases, and imposing increased stress on Iowa families,” said Peter Thorne, Professor and Head of the Department of Occupational & Environmental Health, College of Public Health, University of Iowa.

The fourth annual statement, “**Iowa Climate Statement 2014: Impacts on the Health of Iowans,**” which was released today, was signed by **180** science faculty and researchers from **38** Iowa colleges and universities.

The scientists say the health-related effects of extreme weather events are the most obvious, immediate, and direct. These events are increasing in frequency and severity as our atmosphere warms and holds more moisture.

“Repeated heavy rains increase human exposure to toxic chemicals and raw sewage that are spread by flood waters,” said David Osterberg, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, University of Iowa.

Degraded water quality is also directly associated with climate change. “In farm states like Iowa, higher water temperatures combine with high nutrient levels to create large harmful algal blooms which make water unsuitable for human and animal consumption and for recreation,” stated Osterberg.

“The strong support for the statement reflects the consensus among Iowa science faculty and research staff that action is needed now to lower emissions and find new ways to adapt to climate changes in order to reduce the risks of new health problems,” stated Dave Courard-Hauri, Associate Professor, Environmental Science and Policy Program, Drake University.

Climate change is also making it more difficult for many Iowans to breathe. Plants produce more pollen, pollen that is increasingly potent in response to warmer temperatures and higher carbon dioxide levels in the air.

“The number of Iowans with respiratory problems such as childhood asthma has increased dramatically since the 1980s. In many cases, this is linked to increased exposures to mold and to higher indoor moisture, as well as to lung-damaging ozone and fine particulate matter from burning fossil fuels,” said Thorne.

“New infectious diseases are becoming more common in the Midwest as the organisms that carry them move north due to rising temperatures. Disease carrying mosquitoes and ticks are living longer and expanding their range due to increasing temperatures, more rainfall, and longer summers,” said Yogesh Shah, Associate Dean, Department of Global Health, Des Moines University.

“Our changing climate’s influence on mental health is less obvious, but it is well established that thousands of Iowans have been impacted by stress from the loss of homes and income due to climate-related flooding and drought,” Mary Mincer Hansen, Adjunct Professor, College of Health Sciences MPH Program, Des Moines University.

“As long as greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, climate-related health problems will continue to grow,” said Neil Bernstein, Chair, Department of Natural and Applied Sciences, Mount Mercy University. The scientists agree that adopting strong climate-change policies will play a vital role in diminishing human suffering and illness now and for generations to come.

“It is clear that expanding energy efficiency and clean renewable energy efforts will have the co-benefits of reducing air pollution and the creation of additional jobs and economic opportunities for Iowans,” stated Bernstein.

**End**

The lead authors of the “Iowa Climate Statement 2014: Impacts on the Health of Iowans” include:

**Peter S. Thorne**, Professor and Head Department of Occupational & Environmental Health, Director, Environmental Health Sciences Research Center, College of Public Health, University of Iowa

**Yogesh Shah**, Associate Dean, Department of Global Health, Des Moines University

**David Osterberg**, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, College of Public Health, University of Iowa

**Mary Mincer Hansen**, Adjunct Professor, College of Health Sciences MPH Program, Des Moines University

**David Courard-Hauri**, Associate Professor, Environmental Science and Policy Program, Drake University

**Neil Bernstein**, Chair, Department of Natural and Applied Sciences, Mount Mercy University.

Editing assistance by **Connie Mutel**, Senior Science Writer, IHR-Hydroscience & Engineering, University of Iowa.

## Iowa Climate Statement 2014: Impacts on the Health of Iowans

The 38 Colleges and Universities of statement endorsers:

Buena Vista University	Maharishi University of Management
Central College	Morningside College
Clarke University	Mount Mercy University
Coe College	Northeast Iowa Community College
Cornell College	Northwestern College
Des Moines Area Community College	Scott Community College
Des Moines University	Simpson College
Dordt College	Southeastern Community College
Drake University	Southwestern Community College
Eastern Iowa Community College	Saint Ambrose University
Ellsworth Community College	University of Dubuque
Grinnell College	University of Iowa
Indian Hills Community College	University of Northern Iowa
Iowa Central Community College	Upper Iowa University
Iowa Lakes Community College	Waldorf College
Iowa State University	Wartburg College
Iowa Western Community College	Western Iowa Tech Community College
Kirkwood Community College	William Penn University
Loras College	
Luther College	

*Endorser affiliations are for identification purposes only and do not reflect views of their academic institutions.*

The statement can be found at  
[www.cgrer.uiowa.edu](http://www.cgrer.uiowa.edu)

