

Ocean Challenge Live!—The Vendée Globe
Solo, non-stop, around-the-world race

WEEK

7 Climate Change

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By Rich Wilson, Skipper
Aboard *Great American III*

In the last two days here in the Indian Ocean, we have been hammered by two severe storms with near-hurricane-force winds and mountainous seas. I'm tired, cold, and scared. But it was my choice to enter the Vendée Globe, and it is my responsibility therefore to deal with Mother Nature as she is.

In an analogous, moral way it is up to humankind to deal with the Earth's climate as it is, and not to allow our activities to change it. Sadly, we have violated that moral truth by causing global warming.

Since we are on a path of climate change, what is our responsibility now? I believe that it is to say,

“OK. We caused this problem, and we must do something to fix it.” Now we must have enough strength of character to make sacrifices for the betterment of the planet and of the 6 billion humans on it. We must slow and then stop this manmade climate change.

We in advanced economies and developed nations can often buy our way out of problems. We tend to think, “It's going to get hotter? Turn on more air conditioning!” Unfortunately that approach will only worsen the problem. And the underdeveloped nations of the world, who live more closely than we to nature, and therefore depend on nature staying consistent, will suffer the most. And it is simply not fair for us to change their environment.



Antarctic Ice Shelves

By Jan Witting, Faculty
Sea Education Association

Rich is alone in an endless landscape of waves, traveling the world's oceans with occasional sightings of seabirds, flying fish, and whales. For me, as a sea-going oceanographer, the ocean always looks so much bigger than we humans that it is difficult to believe that we could somehow change it. But we can, and we are.

So what kind of changes can be felt out there on the high seas? Well, global climate change and warming temperatures have done some things that are quite visible. Let's take the Southern Ocean, where Rich is now, as an example.

The big ice shelves surrounding Antarctica have started to break up during the past years. These huge plates of thick, floating ice are hundreds of years old, and they are big enough to see from satellites. The most recent shelf to break up is the Wilkins Ice Shelf, and it broke up just this past spring. As big as the state of Connecticut, this shelf broke apart into smaller bits and is floating away slowly out to sea.

There are many other changes oceanographers worldwide are keeping an eye on. Some examples are the rise of sea level, changes in the ocean currents, and ocean acidification.

Earth really is the ocean planet, so if you think about it, global climate change will be felt in the oceans, too.

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