Report: 2000-10 hottest decade on record

By K. Kaufmann, Desert Sun

It's now official. The decade of 2001-2010 was the warmest on record, causing almost a 2,300 percent spike worldwide in heat-related deaths.

That shocking figure is one of many contained in the report, "The Global Climate 2001-2010, A Decade of Climate Extremes," released last week in Geneva by the World Meteorological Organization. An agency of the United Nations, the WMO has members from 191 countries and territories worldwide and is dedicated to creating networks for collecting and sharing weather and climate data and expertise.

The report is 20 pages of meteorological figures and charts, some rather technical, but what it all boils down to, in the report's opening sentence, is that:

"The first decade of the 21st century was the warmest decade recorded since modern measurements began around 1850. It saw above-average precipitation, including one year – 2010 – that broke all previous records.

"Many of these events and trends can be explained by the natural variability of the climate system. Rising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, however, are also affecting the climate. Detecting the respective roles being played by climate variability and human-induced climate change is one of the key challenges facing researchers today."

What all this means, according to the WMO summary of the report:

"Every year of the decade except 2008 was among the 10 warmest

years on record. … Results from WMO’s survey showed that nearly 94 percent of reporting countries had their warmest decade in 2001-2010 and no country reported a nationwide average decadal temperature anomaly cooler than the long-term average.”

The long-term analysis is important, the report notes, because distinguishing between individual extreme weather events and climate change requires long-term data, precisely because extreme weather events do not occur frequently. A decade is the minimum time frame for detecting temperature changes, the report says.