Summary

It's understandable that people are in a state of denial about the seriousness of climate change and the need for action. But reality can only be denied for so long. The last three years have been the hottest ever globally. Disastrous droughts are hitting Europe and the Colorado River. Time to wake up up and small the coffee!

Climate change is, apparently, passé. Democratic politicians are avoiding the topic and dialing back ambitious plans to reduce emissions. The President apparently doesn’t think it exists, and the government’s official position is that its effects are too uncertain to worry about. Amazon and other corporations had solemnly pledged to become carbon neutral. Now Amazon is about to open its own power plant for an AI data center, which will instantly become the largest source of carbon emissions of any power plant in the country.

Denial isn’t the world’s best coping mechanism, but it works, at least temporarily. The problem is that, while sometimes that lump you were worried about does go away, sometimes it keeps growing and getting harder to treat. In the end, reality doesn’t much care whether you believe in it. In fact, if you had a philosophical bent, you could define reality as the thing that keeps happening whether we perceive or believe in it.

Climate change, alas, falls into the category of things that only get worse if you avoid thinking about them. And what we know is that the global temperature was steadily increasing over the past fifty years, but it’s taken a jump in the past few years. On land, according to BerkeleyEarth, it’s about 3.7 °F above the preindustrial level. A few degrees may not seem like a big deal, but small changes in temperature averages translate into big changes in extreme events. If this is a temporary blip, it’s giving us a glimpse into the “normal” climate a few years down the road. Instead, of being a blip, it could be a signal that climate change is unexpectedly accelerating. In that case, things are going to be worse than we thought and sooner than we thought.

Whichever view you take, this has been an ugly year in terms of weather. The Colorado River is in crisis due to drought, with Lake Mead at a record low. The Danube and the Rhine are only nine inches deep with a month of summer yet to go. Droughts across Europe are drying up rivers and exposing sunken Nazi ships. Raging forest fires in the Canadian North made the air unbreathable in much of the

Midwest and Northeast. A couple of days ago, Seoul reached 104 ° F. July was the hottest month ever recorded in France, and another heatwave is now hitting. In China, heavy rain and flooding have destroyed roads and buildings and forced mass evacuations. And to make things worse, a typhoon has just hit. Meanwhile, we’re heading for a super El Niño, which is likely to lead to record-breaking planetary temperatures. In short, things are very much *not* under control.

There are all kinds of perfectly understandable, very human reasons why people aren’t focused on climate change. The problem is that the physics of climate change cares nothing about our feelings. If we fail to act, things will get much more painful down the road. I’m as much prone to denial as anyone else. But sometimes, you just have to grit your teeth and look reality squarely in the face.