



California's historic drought appears to be matched by severe dry spells on three other continents. Brazil, North Korea and South Africa are bearing the brunt of much lower-than-average precipitation, wreaking havoc on millions of peoples' lives and livelihoods.

While the causes vary from country to country, the chance of more intense droughts in the future as a result of man-made climate change is only increasing as regional extremes of precipitation — both more and less — remain likely, according to the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Every drought is unique, said Peter Gleick, president of the Pacific Institute, a global water think tank in Oakland. "The same drought in California would have very different impacts in other countries," he said.

What's considered a drought in Bali, Indonesia — where six days without rain is unusual — would certainly not be considered a drought in Libya — where annual rainfall is just 7 inches — the National Drought Mitigation Center reported.

In some parts of the world — such as the Middle East — drought is simply a permanent part of life because of the chronic lack of water, making desalination and the reuse of wastewater far more commonplace there, said Charles Iceland of the D.C.-based World Resources Institute.

Overall, tracking droughts globally is difficult: No country outside the U.S. has a comprehensive effort to monitor it, said climatologist Brian Fuchs of the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Neb.

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