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# Shifts could bring more severe weather to area

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## MORE INFORMATION



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Megan Schargorodski watched the Dec. 11 tornadoes that slammed Warren County and other parts of Kentucky with a bit more interest than most.

As interim state climatologist and interim director of the Kentucky Climate Center and Kentucky Mesonet, Schargorodski perhaps wasn't as surprised by the deadly tornadoes as many local residents were.

“We used to have the ‘tornado alley’ in the Great Plains out west and down into Texas,” she said Monday. “You also had the ‘Dixie Alley’ in the Alabama and Mississippi area.



## Poll Status: Live

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“Now it’s shifting north and east. That’s not good for us (in Kentucky). The general trend is for these severe storms to move toward Kentucky.”

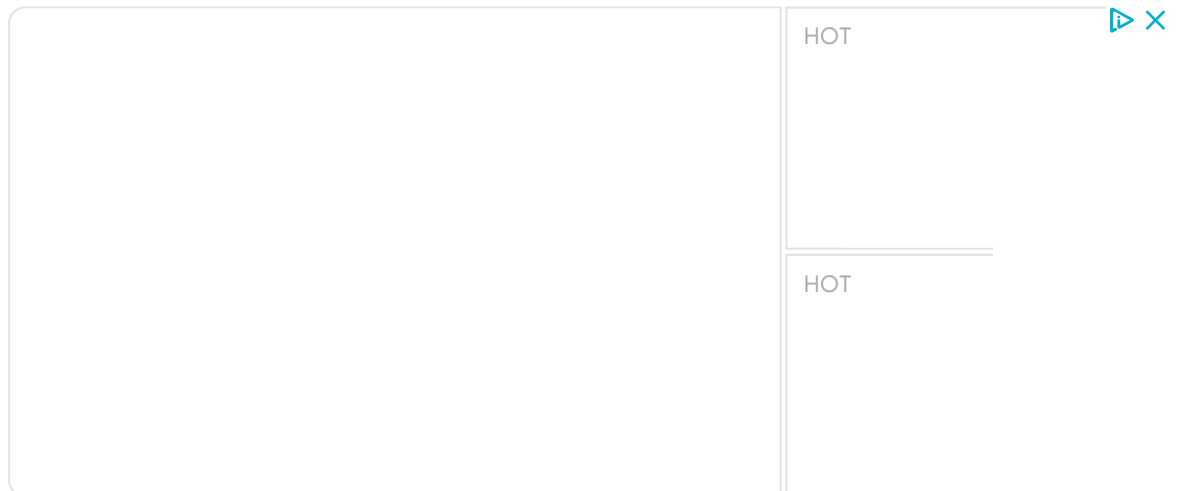
Whether you can chalk it up to climate change, to the influence of the La Niña weather patterns in the Pacific Ocean, or to both, the trend is real.



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“Basically every year we’re setting some sort of record, whether it’s for temperature or rainfall,” said Schargorodski, who took over leadership of the Kentucky Mesonet weather monitoring network after the June 2021 retirement of Stuart Foster. “What happened in December emphasizes that we do have these changing weather patterns and are seeing these extremes.”

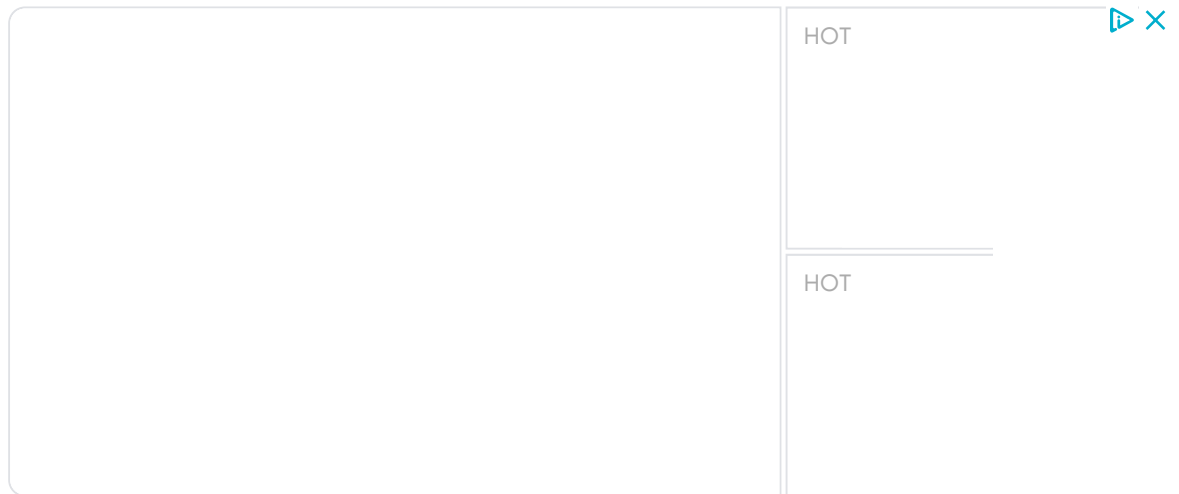


Schargorodski, though, isn’t extreme in her thoughts about the causes of the severe weather.

“I wouldn’t say there’s a hard link between climate change and the tornadoes,” she said. “You have to keep in mind that there’s La Niña going on in the Pacific that’s disrupting weather patterns and

giving us these ideal conditions for the events that happened in December.”

At least one local environmentalist draws more of a correlation between human-caused climate change and severe weather.



Tom Morris, a Bowling Green resident and a former chairman of the Kentucky chapter of the Sierra Club, calls climate change “the biggest issue humanity is facing today.”

“No specific event can be said to be 100% caused by climate change,” Morris said. “But the frequency of the extreme events and the possibility of them happening can be attributed to it.

“It’s an indication that something has changed in the climate. The change in carbon dioxide levels has caused warming and destabilized the weather.”

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Whether she agrees with Morris or not, Schargorodski does believe the time is now to prepare for more extreme weather events and take some steps toward being better stewards of the environment.

“We can’t prevent tornadoes, but we can build things better,” she said. “It’s more about preparation and mitigation.”

Building stronger structures isn’t the only measure called for, though. Schargorodski would like to see an acceleration in the move toward renewable energy and other “green” initiatives.

“We need to make good choices with the environment and not be as wasteful,” she said. “The little things all add up. Not one group is going to be able to do all the fixing, but we can all do our part.”

Schargorodski is encouraged by moves toward clean energy such as the development of a solar farm in

Logan County, but she realizes that such developments aren't easily embraced in Kentucky.

"It's really difficult in all the coal-mining areas and for industry that has done things a certain way for a long time," she said.

Schargorodski said she has seen a growing interest from utility companies in the data that Kentucky Mesonet can provide about best locations for generating electricity from solar and wind.

She hopes Kentucky Mesonet and the Kentucky Climate Center can be better sources for that sort of information as they continue to grow.

Although the Mesonet site in Princeton was destroyed in the December tornadoes, Schargorodski said plans are in the works to replace that site and add more weather stations around the state.

“We have 76 stations in 73 counties,” she said. “We have a handful more coming on this year and in the next few years. We already are pretty much statewide. Now we’re trying to fill in some gaps.”

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