

Coral reefs around the world are suddenly starving and in many cases dying, the **LA Times-Washington Post Service** reported in October 1990, "because of abnormally warm seas. The news service quotes leading marine scientists as seeing this phenomenon as an early warning system for environmental degradation.

The coral reef die-off occurred three times in the 1980s and may be more serious this year (1990), biologists contend. Locales where coral reefs are "blotchy and sickly" include the Florida Keys, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Bermuda, Hawaii, and Okinawa, and most researchers suspect higher sea

temperatures as the culprit. As water heats up, the coral polyps that build the reef with their skeletal remains spit out the microscopic algae that help feed the coral and give the reef its golden, red, and yellow hues. The phenomenon is called "bleaching." Without its algal partner, the coral becomes weak and stops reproducing. After several weeks, it may die.

Robert Wicklund of the NOAA Caribbean Marine Research Center sees the reefs as "in peril and disappearing at an alarming rate." Corals in past episodes would often return to health, but there is preliminary evidence, he said, that repeated stress may make recovery more difficult.