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Greenland ice sheets melting: Global warming advances faster than anticipated

AM - Friday, 11 August , 2006 08:38:00

Reporter: Sarah Clarke

TONY EASTLEY: As the world digests the flow on from rising petrol prices, the implications of its increased use are also being debated.

A new study published in the journal *Science* reveals that global warming is melting Greenland's ice sheet three times faster than scientists had thought.

Environment reporter Sarah Clarke.

SARAH CLARKE: Greenland boasts the second largest ice cap on earth, containing ten per cent of the world's total ice mass. Research had indicated that global warming was melting the ice sheet at 80 cubic kilometres a year.

But new research shows the ice sheet is now disappearing three times faster than scientists had thought.

Dr Jianli Chen is from the University of Texas.

JIANLI CHEN: We're talking about 240 cubic kilometres per year, it's about three times faster. And that shows, you know, over east Greenland there's a significant loss of melting or

mass loss during the period from April 2002 and November 2005.

SARAH CLARKE: The study used satellites to measure gravity changes to calculate this accelerated melt rate.

If the research is right then scientists warn the speed and height of sea levels rising will be directly effected. And over time even big coastal cities like New York and Sydney will be affected.

Dr John Church is the Chair of the Joint Scientific Committee of World Climatic Research. He's also from CSIRO.

JOHN CHURCH: Greenland contains enough water to raise sea levels by between six and seven metres, so over a several hundred to a thousand year time scale you're talking about sea level rises of six to seven metres and that would have very significant impacts on many areas around the world, many of the major coastal mega cities, cities with populations of ten million people and more are on the coast and would be susceptible.

Even cities like New York, London would be susceptible to sea level rises of that magnitude and also of course countries like Bangladesh.

SARAH CLARKE: Despite changes in global climate, new research also published in *Science* shows that snowfall in Antarctica has changed very little in the past 50 years.

Snowfall had been expected to increase with a warming climate, because warmer air can hold more moisture, but that wasn't the case.

Dr Tas Van Ommen from the Australian Antarctic Division co-authored the study.

TAS VAN OMMEN: The big surprise is that if there isn't an increase in snowfall accumulation that's going to lead to less water being locked up in Antarctica and consequently a more rapid increase in sea level than has been projected.

TONY EASTLEY: Dr Tas Van Ommen from the Australian Antarctic Division speaking there with Sarah Clarke.

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