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Greenland's ice sheet melting much faster than previous estimates

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Greenland's ice sheet melting much faster than previous estimates

Washington, Aug 11: New [satellite images](#) have revealed that the melting of Greenland's ice sheet has increased dramatically in the past few years, and much of the loss has occurred primarily along one shoreline, potentially affecting weather in [Western Europe](#).

The study by researchers from the [University of Texas](#) at Austin said that the loss of ice has been occurring about five times faster from Greenland's southeastern region in the past two years than in the previous year and a half.

"Our latest GRACE findings are the most complete measurement of ice mass loss for Greenland. The sobering thing to see is that the whole process of glacial melting is stepping up much more rapidly than before," said Byron Tapley, director of the university's Center for Space Research (CSR) and holder of the Clare Cockrell Williams Centennial Chair in Engineering.

Prof. Tapley said Greenland was considered the second largest reservoir of fresh water on Earth after Antarctica and its melting from these two regions was expected to impact sea level and ocean circulation, and potentially the future of climates worldwide.

The amount of fresh water contributed from the melting of its ice sheet could add 0.56 millimetres annually to a global increase in sea levels, higher than all previously published measurements, he added.

"These findings are consistent with the most recent independent measurements of Greenland's mass done by other techniques like satellite radar interferometry, but in this case they provide a direct measure of ice-mass changes," said Geology Professor Clark Wilson and a co-author of the study in the journal Science.

Researchers said within the subpolar zone that includes Greenland, the rapid rise in meltwater along its eastern coast could add to other warming-related factors believed to be weakening the counterclockwise flow of the North Atlantic Current.

"For instance, the increased meltwater could change how more buoyant fresh water mixes with salt water in a branch of this flow called the Norwegian Current. This change could lower the temperatures of water, and thus wind, that [travels](#) past the west coast of Ireland and Great Britain. That ocean temperature change would occur because the current might not move northward past Norway before returning to more southerly latitudes. Warmer, southerly waters would be stalled from moving northward if that happened, resulting in chillier winters in parts of Western Europe. If



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enough fresh water enters the Norwegian Current and you interrupt return flow, then there could be climate effects in Europe," Prof. Tapley added.

[Researchers](#) said estimates showed that 69 percent of the ice-mass loss in recent years came from eastern Greenland. Of the 57 cubic miles (239 cubic kilometres) of water mass lost on average each year, 39 cubic miles (164 cubic kilometres) were from the eastern shoreline. More than half of that eastern loss involved ice from the glacier complex in southeast Greenland.

"This melting process may be approaching a point where it won't be centuries before Greenland's ice melts, but a much shorter time-frame," Prof. Tapley said.

Researchers further said that the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) mission funded by NASA and the German Aerospace Center, had so far provided the most comprehensive monthly estimates of Greenland's ice-mass balance.

--- ANI

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