

Antarctic ice loss vaster, faster than thought: study

PARIS (AFP) — The East Antarctic ice sheet, once seen as largely unaffected by global warming, has lost billions of tons of ice since 2006 and could boost sea levels in the future, according to a new study.

Published Sunday in Nature Geoscience, the same study shows that the smaller but less stable West Antarctic ice sheet is also shedding significant mass.

Scientists worry that rising global temperatures could trigger a rapid disintegration of West Antarctica, which holds enough frozen water to push up the global ocean watermark by about five metres (16 feet).

In 2007 the UN Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) predicted sea levels would rise 18 to 59 centimeters (7.2 to 23.2 inches) by 2100, but this estimate did not factor in the potential impact of crumbling ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica.

Today many of the same scientist say that even if heat-trapping CO2 emissions are curtailed, the ocean watermark is more likely to go up by nearly a meter, enough to render several small island nations unlivable and damage fertile deltas home to hundreds of millions.

More than 190 nations gather in Copenhagen next month to hammer out a global climate deal to curb greenhouse gases and help poor countries cope with its consequences.

University of Texas professor Jianli Chen and colleagues analyzed nearly seven years of data



on ocean ice-sheet interaction in Antarctica.

Covering the period up January 2009, the data was collected by the twin GRACE satellites, which detect mass flows in the ocean and polar regions by measuring changes in Earth's gravity field.

Consistent with earlier findings based on different methods,

they found that West Antarctica dumped, on average, about 132 billion tons of ice into the sea each year, give or take 26 billion tons.

They also found for the first time that East Antarctica -- on the Eastern Hemisphere side of the continent -- is likewise losing mass, mostly in coastal regions,

at a rate of about 57 billion tons annually.

The margin of error, they cautioned, is almost as large as the estimate, meaning ice loss could be a little as a few billion tons or more than 100.

Up to now, scientists had thought that East Antarctica was in "balance," meaning that it accu-

mulated as much mass and it gave off, perhaps a bit more.

"Acceleration of ice loss in recent years over the entire continent is thus indicated," the authors conclude. "Antarctica may soon be contributing significantly more to global sea level rise."

Another study published last week in the journal Nature reported an upwardly-revised figure for Antarctic temperatures during prior "interglacials", warm periods such as our own that have occurred roughly every 100,000 years.

During the last interglacial which peaked some 128,000 years ago, called the Eemian Period, temperatures in the region were probably six degree Celsius (10.8 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than today, which is about 3 C (5.4 C) above previous estimates, the study said.

The findings suggest that the region may be more sensitive than scientists thought to greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere that were roughly equivalent to present day levels.

During the Eemian, sea levels were five-to-seven meters higher than today.



Microsoft, News Corp. discuss Google content, FT says

Microsoft Corp. held talks with News Corp. about paying the Wall Street Journal publisher to remove reports from Google Inc.'s search engine, the Financial Times reported, citing a person familiar with the matter.

The talks are at an early stage, the newspaper reported on its Web site. News Corp. is one of several online publishers Microsoft has approached to remove their Web sites from Google, according to the newspaper.

The move indicates a "direct assault" on Google because it may pressure the owner of the Internet search engine to pay for content, according to the FT. News Corp. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Rupert Murdoch and his son James Murdoch, who heads the European and Asian operations, have said they plan to charge for online content.

Google doesn't comment on speculation, the Mountain View, California-based company said in a statement today.

"We believe search engines are of real benefit to newspapers," the statement said. "Google has a clear policy of respecting the wishes of content owners." Amelia Agrawal, a Singapore-based spokeswoman at Microsoft, couldn't immediately comment. Jannie Poon, a Hong Kong-based spokeswoman at News Corp., declined to comment.

"The key step in developing a key wholesale marketplace for digital journalism is starting to ask a price," James Murdoch said Nov. 19 at a Morgan Stanley conference in Barcelona. "We invest quite a lot in our journalism and we are proud of it and we think we should charge a fair price for it."

Newspapers have been seeking new sources of revenue to counter the loss of advertising and paying readers to the Internet. U.S. newspaper industry ad revenue fell 28 percent in the third quarter to \$6.44 billion, according to estimates by the Newspaper Association of America last week.

The Wall Street Journal in October began charging for access on mobile devices such as Research In Motion Ltd.'s BlackBerry and announced plans for a higher-priced WSJ Professional Web site.

(Source: Bloomberg)

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