Better altimetry; better El Nino forecasts

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Oceanographers at the University of New Hampshire say improvements in measuring sea level by satellite are helping predict El Nino events.

A paper published Tuesday in the Journal of Geophysical Research-Oceans says the satellite radar improvements can lead to better forecasts of events such as El Nino and La Nina -- ocean/atmosphere phenomena that can alter global weather patterns.

Previously, about 6 percent of all global altimetry measurements have been discarded because of inaccurate readings. Since millions of altimeter measurements are made each year, that 6 percent translates into a huge amount of unused data, said the study's co-author, Doug Vandemark, a radar engineer/oceanographer and research professor at the University of New Hampshire's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space.

The improvements in satellite altimetry are expected to provide agencies such as NASA and NOAA with more accurate measurements for El Nino predictions and tracking.

The paper's lead author was Jean Tournadre of the French Institute of Research for the Exploitation of the Sea.