

Melting ice prompts navigation warning

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The U.S.-based International Ice Charting Working Group predicted significant navigation hazards will develop as Arctic sea ice diminishes.

The statement was released during a conference last week at the European Space Agency's Earth Observation Center in Frascati, Italy.

At the end of September, satellites indicated the Arctic sea ice was at its lowest extent in the history of ice charting. "The International Ice Charting Working Group cautions that sea ice and icebergs will continue to present significant hazards to navigation for the foreseeable future," the scientists said in a statement.

During the last 25 years, satellites observed the minimum Arctic ice coverage at the end of summer decreased from around 3 million square miles during the early 1980s to less than 1.6 million square miles as observed in September.

That reduction in sea ice has occurred much more quickly than global climate models predicted.

"The overall extent was similar to what some of the models envisioned but decades in advance of when they expected that would occur," said Douglas Bancroft, director of the Canadian Ice Service. "In fact, the summer of 2007 looked very similar to some climate model forecasts for 2030 to 2050."

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