

Europe, US to see snowy, cold winters: expert

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Big Ben is masked by snow as heavy winter conditions hit central London, in January 2010. Europe, North America and east Asia can expect more cold, moist and snowy winters such as the one just passed, a top scientist said Friday.

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While it may seem counter-intuitive, warmer Arctic climes caused by [climate change](#) influence air pressure at the North Pole, shifting wind patterns in such a way as to boost cooling over adjacent swathes of the planet.

"Cold and snowy winters will be the rule rather than the exception," said

James Overland of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Continued rapid loss of ice will be an important driver of major change in the world's climate system in the coming years, he said at an Oslo meeting of scientists reviewing research from the two-year International Polar Year 2007-2008.

The exceptionally chilly winter of 2009-2010 in temperate zones of the [northern hemisphere](#) were connected to unique physical processes in the Arctic, he said.

"The emerging impact of greenhouse gases is an important factor in the changing Arctic," he explained in a statement.

"What was not fully recognized until now is that a combination of an unusual warm period due to natural variability, loss of sea ice reflectivity, ocean heat storage, and changing wind patterns all working together to disrupt the memory and stability of the Arctic climate system," he said.

The region is warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the planet, a phenomenon known as Arctic amplification.

Resulting ice loss is significantly greater than earlier [climate models](#) predicted.

The [polar ice cap](#) shrank to its smallest surface since records have been kept in 2007, and early data suggests it could become even smaller this summer.

"It is unlikely that the [Arctic](#) can return to its previous condition," Overland said. "The changes are irreversible."

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