

Russia sees record high average temperatures in 2020

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Russia in 2020 saw record high average temperatures and a historic decline in summer ice cover on its Arctic maritime route, the country's weather monitor said Thursday.

Russia's average annual temperature last year was 3.22 degrees Celsius higher than the average for the period of 1961-1990 and more than one degree higher than the country's previous record in 2007, Rosgidromet said in a report.

"Last year turned out to be extremely warm both in our country and for the planet as a whole," the weather monitor said, noting that Russia's increasing rate of warming was "much higher" than the global average.

The weather monitor added that Russia's Arctic maritime shipping route—the Northern Sea Route—"in some years is almost completely free of ice by the end of the summer".

The ice cover was also now "five to seven times" thinner than in the 1980s, Rosgidromet noted.

"In 2020, the surface of ice cover by September reached a record low level of 26,000 square kilometres," it said.

The report also said that the thickness of the melted permafrost layer that thaws annually is also growing.

Earlier this week Rosgidromet predicted that the country would see above-average temperatures in the spring, with dry weather in Siberia leading to more forest fires this year.

Record temperatures

Forest fires have blazed across Siberia with increasing regularity in recent years, which Russia's weather officials have partly linked to climate change.

Russia has set numerous heat records over the past few years, with the

first half of 2020 seeing the warmest temperatures since the country began weather observations.

In June last year, Russia registered temperatures of 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) in the town of Verkhoyansk—the highest temperature recorded above the Arctic circle since measurements began at the end of the 19th century.

President Vladimir Putin has noted the benefits of warmer temperatures opening up transportation routes like the Northern Sea Route, planning to use it to export oil and gas to markets in Asia as the route becomes increasingly free of ice.

But climate change is a particular hazard for Russia's infrastructure built on permafrost, which covers about two-thirds of the vast country.

The melting of permafrost also releases carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere that further triggers global warming.

In addition to the Arctic, scientists say Siberia is one of the world's regions that will suffer the most from climate change—from forest fires to increased flooding and the spread of invasive species.

On Tuesday, Rosgidromet's head of science Roman Vilfand said that the country has seen cataclysmic weather events double over the past 25 years.

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