

Arctic ice pack at third lowest extent since 1979: US

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Handout picture captured in 2007 by the Advanced Microwave Scanning Radiometer (AMSR-E) Instrument on NASA's Aqua satellite overlaid on the NASA Blue Marble captures ice conditions at the end of the melt season in the Arctic. The Arctic sea ice pack thawed to its third smallest size on record during the northern hemisphere summer of 2009, US government scientists said, citing satellite images.

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While the sea ice pack at its lowest 2009 point was slightly larger than both the record-low ice pack measured in 2007 and the summer 2008 ice pack, the data confirms a shrinkage trend seen over the past 30 years, the US National Snow and Ice Data Center said in a statement late Thursday.

The [Arctic sea](#) ice pack size has fallen sharply since 1979, especially during the summer months, the center said.

As of September 12, the surface of the Arctic sea ice pack was 5.1 million square kilometers (1.97 million square miles), its smallest point of the year.

At the peak of the summer 2007 melt the Arctic [sea ice](#) pack measured 4.1 million square kilometers -- a record low -- while the following year at the lowest point it measured 4.5 million square kilometers.

The summer 2009 low point however was still 1.61 million square kilometers (620,000 square miles) less than the annual 1979 to 2000 average ice pack size, the NSIDC said.

The center's glaciologists attributed the difference in the size of the 2009 ice pack compared to the previous two years to prevailing winds blowing in a different direction.

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