

By: Sachin Sachin, Science Editor

[We Are Losing the Mountain Glaciers Twice Faster: up to 1.4 m \(4.6 ft\) per Year](#)

Especially in Europe

We are losing our mountain glaciers, and we're losing them increasingly fast. A report made by the World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS), supported by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), shows that the speed of glacier melting has increased by more than twice from 1980, being a serious climate change indicator. Average glacial shrinkage has increased from 30 cm (1 ft) per year between 1980 and 1999, to 0.5 m of 'water equivalent' in 2005 and 1.4 m (4.6 ft) of 'water equivalent' in 2006. 'Water equivalent' measures glacier thickening and thinning, and 1 m water equivalent means 1.1m in ice thickness. The heaviest losses have been experienced by glaciers in the European Alps and Pyrenees mountain ranges. "Millions if not billions of people depend directly or indirectly on these natural water storage facilities for drinking water, agriculture, industry and power generation during key parts of the year. There are many canaries emerging in the climate change coal mine. The glaciers are perhaps among those making the most noise and it is absolutely essential that everyone sits up and takes notice," Achim Steiner, Under-Secretary General of the UN and executive director of UNEP, told BBC News. "Action is already being taken. The elements of a green economy are emerging from the more the money invested in renewable energies. The litmus test will come in late 2009 at the climate convention meeting in Copenhagen. Here governments must agree on a decisive new emissions reduction and adaptation-focused regime," added Steiner. The new report investigated the behavior of 100 glaciers in 9 mountain ranges. "The latest figures are part of what appears to be an accelerating trend with no apparent end in sight. This continues the trend in accelerated ice loss during the past two and a half decades and brings the total loss since 1980 to more than 10.5 m of water equivalent," said Dr. Wilfried Haeberli, director of the World Glacier Monitoring Service. The annual average loss of 0.3 m during 1980-1999 boomed in our millennium to an average of 0.5 m per year. The record annual loss in the period 1980-1999 (0.7 m or 2.3 ft in 1998) has now been overrun in 2003, 2004 and 2006. The total loss in ice thickness, since 1980, could be more than 11.5 m (38 ft). The most intense ice loss was observed in glaciers from Austria, Norway, Sweden, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. The Norwegian Breidalblikkbrea glacier lost almost 3.1 m (10.3 ft) in one episode representing one of the most spectacular ice losses.