



- Home
- Top News
- Entertainment
- Odd News
- Business
- Sports
- Science
- Health
- Real Estate
- Photos
- Analysis
- Deals

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You are here: [Home](#) / [Science News](#) / [Glaciers very sensitive to climate change](#)

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Glaciers very sensitive to climate change

Published: July 14, 2011 at 7:29 PM

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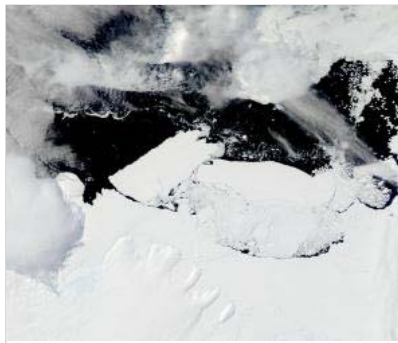
BUFFALO, N.Y., July 14 (UPI) -- Glaciers that calve, or break off, into the sea are particularly sensitive to climate change, U.S. researchers say.

Geologists from the University at Buffalo in New York working in Greenland say such large, marine-calving glaciers have the ability not only to shrink rapidly in response to global warming, but to grow at a remarkable pace during periods of global cooling, a university release reported Thursday.

A study of the Jakobshavn Isbrae glacier, extending from Greenland's west coast, showed the glacier -- which retreated about 25 miles inland between 1850 and 2010 -- expanded outward at a similar pace about 200 years ago during a time of cooler temperatures known as the Little Ice Age.

As one of the world's fastest-moving glaciers releasing huge amounts of Greenland's ice into the ocean, Jakobshavn Isbrae has been the focus of intense scientific interest.

Researchers say changes in the rate at which the glacier calves off icebergs could influence global sea level rise.



This February 20, 2010 image from NASA's Aqua satellite shows an oblong iceberg, roughly the size of Rhode Island, called B-09B (center-right) colliding with the edge of the Mertz Glacier in eastern Antarctica this month, breaking away a new iceberg (top-left) that is nearly as large as B-09B. UPI/NASA

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