

Study: Arctic ice loss could spell more drought for Calif.

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

Californians may have another reason to keep an eye on melting sea ice in the Arctic – at least if they're concerned about the state's propensity for plunging into damaging droughts.

Alongside the obvious perils for polar bears and other wildlife, as well as the problem of rising ocean levels, the massive ice thaw thousands of miles away is triggering changes in the atmosphere that are likely to shrink rainfall close to home, according to research by scientists at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Their study outlines a chain of meteorological events that leads to formation of storm-blocking air masses in the North Pacific. The masses are similar to the so-called Ridiculously Resilient Ridge that kept rain from making landfall during California's five-year drought, forcing widespread water rationing in homes, prompting farmers to fallow fields and causing the Central Valley to sink due to heavy pumping of groundwater.

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