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Global warming 'delays next ice age by 50,000 years'

Man-made carbon emissions mean the world is unlikely to see another ice age for 100,000 years - 50,000 years later than without human influence



The world is unlikely to see another ice age for 100,000 years, the study's authors said. Photo: AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC DIVISION/AFP

By Emily Gosden

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Man-made global warming has delayed the next ice age by 50,000 years, researchers have claimed.

The next ice age is not likely to begin until 100,000 years from now - 50,000 years later than would otherwise have been expected, according to a study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)

The researchers said that ice ages were brought on by a combination of long-term shifts in the Earth's orbit around the sun, and the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The carbon emissions produced by humans burning fossil fuels would be sufficient to radically delay the timing of the next ice age, they predicted.



High carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere will affect the formation of ice sheets, the study said Photo: Alamy

Andrey Ganopolski, lead author of the study, **published in the journal Nature**, said that over the past million years the world had gone through glacial cycles, lasting about 100,000 years each.

In each cycle, roughly 80,000 to 90,000 years were an "ice age" in which large ice sheets covered North America and Eurasia.

"Our study shows that relatively moderate additional anthropogenic CO2-emissions from burning oil, coal and gas are already sufficient to postpone the next ice age for another 50,000 years."

Andrey Ganopolski, PIK



The remaining 10,000 to 20,000 years were "interglacials" - warmer periods such as now, when when no ice sheets over northern continents.

Although the last ice age ended about 10,000 years ago, the study found that even without man-made **climate change**, there would be "an unusually long period in between ice ages" and the next ice age would

not begin until 50,000 years from now.

Mr Ganopolski said this was due to "very peculiar combinations of the parameters of Earth orbit, namely, that the Earths orbit will remain almost perfectly circular for very long time".

But with the added impact of carbon emissions, the next ice age would not be expected until 100,000 years from now.

"Our study shows that relatively moderate additional anthropogenic CO2-emissions from burning oil, coal and gas are already sufficient to postpone the next ice age for another 50,000 years," he said.

"If the next glacial inception will occur in 100,000 years from now, the entire glacial cycle will be skipped, which never happened during the past million years.

"It is mind-boggling that humankind is able to interfere with a mechanism that shaped the world as we know it."



Emissions from burning fossil fuels will delay the next ice age, the researchers said. Photo: ALAMY

Prof Andrew Watson of the University of Exeter said the study confirmed that humans had "cancelled the next ice age".

"Humans now effectively control the climate of the planet," he said.

"If only we were wise enough to be able to use that power responsibly, this might be a good thing, as a planet that avoided major ice ages would probably be better for most of the species living on it.

"Unfortunately, I don't think we've reached that level of wisdom yet."

Prof Richard Allan, of the University of Reading, said the benefit of global warming in delaying the distant prospect of the next ice age was irrelevant compared with the imminent dangerous impacts of climate change.

"The many tens of thousands of years after which the next ice age may commence is very long compared to the appearance of modern human societies and is therefore not worth worrying about compared to immediate concerns about damaging human-caused climate change expected over the coming decades if no action is taken to mitigate this likelihood."



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