

World on 'red alert' after heat records smashed in '23: UN agency

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Geneva, 19 March

The UN weather agency is sounding a "red alert" about global warming, citing record-smashing increases last year in greenhouse gases, land and water temperatures and melting of glaciers and sea ice, and is warning that the world's efforts to reverse the trend have been inadequate. The World Meteorological Organisation said there is a "high probability" that 2024 will be another record-hot year. The Geneva-based agency, in a "State of the Global Climate" report released on Tuesday, ratcheted up concerns that a much-vaunted climate goal is increasingly in jeopardy: That the world can unite to limit planetary warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial levels.

"Never have we been so close – albeit on a temporary basis at the moment – to the 1.5 degrees C lower limit of the Paris agreement on climate change," said Celeste Saulo, the agency's secretary-general. "The WMO community is sounding the red alert to the world." The 12-month period from March 2023 to February 2024 pushed beyond that 1.5-degree limit, averaging 1.56 C (2.81 F) higher, according to the European Union's Copernicus Climate Service. It said the calendar year 2023 was just below 1.5 C at 1.48 C (2.66 F), but a record hot start to this year pushed beyond that level for the 12-month average.

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General Antonio Guterres said. "The latest State of the Global Climate report shows a planet on the brink. Fossil fuel pollution is sending climate chaos off the charts." Omar Baddour, WMO's chief of climate monitoring, said the year after an El Niño event — the cyclical warming of the Pacific Ocean that affects global weather patterns — normally tends to be warmer.

"So we cannot say definitively about 2024 is going to be the warmest year. But what I would say: There is a high probability that 2024 will again break the record of 2023, but let's wait and see," he said. "January was the warmest January on record. So the records are still being broken."

The latest WMO findings are especially stark when compiled in a single report. In 2023, over 90 per cent of ocean waters experienced heat wave conditions at least once. Glaciers monitored since 1950 lost the most ice on record. Antarctic sea ice retreated to its lowest level ever.