



Ocean Circulation and Climate: Chapter 12. Ocean Surface Circulation (International Geophysics)

Nikolai Maximenko, Rick Lumpkin, Luca Centurioni

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This chapter summarizes the history of and recent progress in observations of surface circulation of the ocean. The description is biased toward Lagrangian drifting buoys and satellite altimetry that, in the authors' opinion, have revolutionized our understanding of ocean surface currents by providing a high resolution, continuous global view of mesoscale ocean "weather." We outline the current state of the observing system and characterize geostrophic surface circulation, Ekman currents, and effects of centrifugal force and nonlinear interaction between geostrophic and Ekman currents. This general description is complemented by regional examples, detailing processes in the California Current System, off Senegal, and the Kuroshio interaction with the East and South China Seas. Applications to various tasks, in which surface currents play important role, are illustrated by model simulations of motions of marine debris, including debris generated by the 2011 tsunami in Japan. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the next tasks needed to improve understanding of the dynamics of the surface ocean circulation.

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