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Scientists, policymakers focus on pollutants as key to reducing Arctic warming

Washington, DC – Scientists meeting in Copenhagen to discuss new scientific developments and final negotiations on a new climate deal slated to take place there in December, will be hearing a great deal about the threats of tipping points and changes in the Arctic, including new ways to meet those challenges in the near term.

At the Copenhagen Climate Congress and other meetings across Europe and in the US, the subject of short-lived pollutants (SLPs) is garnering increasing attention as one of the leading fast-acting opportunities to reduce the impact of unexpectedly-rapid changes to the Arctic climate, particularly when it comes to melting glaciers, ice and snow.

“Black carbon, methane, and tropospheric ozone are increasingly seen as leading culprits in causing rapid warming and melting in the Arctic region,” said Brook Yeager, a former Clinton Administration official currently vice president of policy at Clean Air - Cool Planet, and a leading authority on Arctic environmental issues.

The good news, Yeager says, is that these pollutants do not last long in the atmosphere – so action to reduce them can bring positive results more quickly than the equally necessary, but longer-term work of reducing CO₂. This has a greater impact, globally, by slowing permafrost melt and sea level rise; and by helping maintain the Arctic’s critical role in cooling the planet.

Discussion on SLPs is expected to be part of presentations in Copenhagen March 11-13; at the March 13 launching of a new German campaign to retrofit diesel engines to reduce black carbon because of its impact on melting Arctic ice and snow; and in a seminar with Norwegian Environment Minister Eric Solheim and NASA scientist James Hansen to discuss tipping points in Oslo next week; as well as at ministerial meetings in Washington, DC and in Tromsø, Norway, in April.

In Copenhagen, Hansen will be leading a session on SLPs and climate on Wednesday, March 12, at {INSERT TIME and LOCATION} together with Danish scientist Ole John Nielsen.

Arctic warming has reached critical proportions, Yeager noted. Arctic temperatures have increased at almost twice the average global rate over the past 100 years. While rapidly rising CO₂ levels are well known as a primary driver of global and Arctic temperatures, Yeager pointed to new research indicating that reducing short-lived pollutants (SLPs) like black carbon (soot), tropospheric ozone (smog) and methane.

“These pollutants have gained increasing attention as a near-term rapid response to mitigating the effects of global warming, particularly in the Arctic region, because we know what to do about them,” he added. Diesel retrofits and banning of agricultural burning are a few of the more well-known measures, along with greater capture of methane releases from coal, gas, agricultural and land-fill operations.

Black carbon (BC) comes from particles created by inefficient burning from diesel engines, wood burning stoves, and agricultural burning. It has an atmospheric life span of only a few days to a week. Black carbon also contributes to health problems.

Methane is emitted from a variety of energy, agricultural and solid waste sources and has a shorter atmospheric life span (8-10 years) than CO₂, but a much more powerful heat-trapping effect.

Tropospheric (ground-level) ozone, better known as “smog,” is emitted from a variety of industrial and mobile sources. Ozone serves as a greenhouse gas, trapping heat throughout the year. However, its concentrations increase in the Arctic from autumn through spring, transported there primarily from Northern Hemisphere sources, where it can accelerate the onset of spring melt.

For more information on these pollutants and efforts to reduce them, visit <http://www.arcticwarming.net/media>

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