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# MEA BULLETIN

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## Guest Article

### Start, then Strengthen: The Importance of Immediate Action for Climate Mitigation

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Speed matters for successfully managing the transition to a low-carbon future. We need to start now with immediate mitigation to learn what works best to limit climate emissions and enhance sinks, and to build confidence to strengthen efforts in the future. Immediate mitigation also is essential for getting ahead of accelerating climate feedbacks by quickly reducing greenhouse gas concentrations from the current 385 ppm (growing fast at 2 ppm/year) to a safe level – perhaps as low as 350 ppm.

A strong long-term climate treaty is absolutely necessary. We should be working tirelessly to move negotiations forward towards a post-2012/post-Kyoto regime. However, the development, ratification, and implementation of a global treaty are not fast processes. Climate change has the upper hand at the moment, making it clearer every day that tipping points for catastrophic events are uncomfortably close—perhaps ten years away for disintegration of the Greenland Ice Sheet, which will cause up to seven meters of sea-level rise, or for the loss of the Himalayan glaciers and snow-pack, which will dry up vital rivers in India and China.

While we continue our efforts to produce a successful climate treaty, we also need to focus on national, regional, and international actions that can be undertaken immediately to help climate in the near-term so that we have more time to focus on the long-term.

Many of these fast-action strategies are justified not only for climate mitigation, but also for the strong

co-benefits they provide society. Fast action on these strategies also provides experience with specific technologies, including their costs and management requirements for deployment at a global scale. It also spurs development of more effective and cheaper low carbon technologies, and builds confidence and trust among the developed and developing country teams as they work together to implement these new technologies. (The history of environmental protection efforts as shown, for example by the Montreal Protocol, has been that the costs of solutions initially appear daunting—until governments and businesses start implementing specific protections, after which the costs often turn out to be far less than initially feared.) Lastly, early mitigation often helps competitiveness, by making industries more efficient with energy and materials, and by making them more innovative, so that they can develop the technologies that will be needed for further climate mitigation.

#### **START WITH BLACK CARBON**

We should start with black carbon, a component of soot. Black carbon emissions are the second largest contributor to global warming after CO<sub>2</sub> and a significant contributor to Arctic ice-melt. In regions such as the Himalayas, the impact of black carbon on melting snow-packs and glaciers may be equal to that of CO<sub>2</sub>. Reducing black carbon may be the fastest strategy for slowing climate change and the most effective way to mitigate Arctic warming.

Addressing black carbon emissions—through new laws as well as through better compliance with existing laws—also would provide significant health benefits, saving millions of lives a year that otherwise would be lost to air pollution. Addressing black carbon would also benefit agriculture by reducing damaging impacts on plants, improving crop productivity, and reducing threats to food security.

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***CONTINUE STRENGTHENING THE MONTREAL PROTOCOL***

Strengthening the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty is another fast-action climate mitigation strategy. Last year, at the 20th anniversary meeting, the 191 Parties continued their “start and strengthen” strategy with an historic agreement to accelerate the phase-out of HCFCs, ensuring significant climate mitigation, along with faster recovery of the ozone layer.

This year the Parties are considering further strengthening the Montreal Protocol to address banks of CFCs, HCFCs, and other chemicals that will be released from old products and equipment at end-of-life. These products represent an estimated 7.4 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>-eq. by 2015 and more thereafter. Argentina, Micronesia, and Mauritius submitted proposals in May to destroy these banks when unnecessary, while the US is also expected to support the measures as well by submitting a proposed decision.

In addition to addressing banks, other measures can further strengthen the Montreal Protocol to maximize its climate benefits, including tightening exemptions for essential and critical uses of ozone depleting substances, chemical feedstocks and process agents and strengthening efforts to combat illegal trade.

***PHASE DOWN HFCS FAST***

Moving regulation of HFCs (gases which have high global warming potentials) from the Kyoto Protocol to the Montreal Protocol or to a separate Montreal Protocol-type regulatory regime, would ensure commitment from all 191 Parties (including the US) and greatly benefit climate.

***USE ALL AVAILABLE MITIGATION MEASURES***

There are many additional ways to mitigate climate emissions in the near-term, using national, regional, and international laws, to:

- protect and expand forests,
- expand bio-char sequestration,
- reduce other non-CO<sub>2</sub> gasses—CH<sub>4</sub>, SF<sub>6</sub>, PFCs, and N<sub>2</sub>O,
- reduce precursors for tropospheric ozone,
- expand wind and other renewable energy sources, and
- improve energy efficiency.

We must act fast. The clock is ticking.