



Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

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New Climate Report “Sounds Alarm” for Fast Action in US

Washington, DC, May 14, 2011 – Global climate change is real and the danger it poses to the US and the world demands aggressive national policies to quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, according to a report published on May 12 by The National Research Council of the National Academies of Science. The report, *America's Climate Choices*, points out that approximately 20% of the CO₂ emitted today will remain in the atmosphere for more than a millennium, and is ultimately the primary driver of long-term climate change. For this reason it is critical to take fast mitigation actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the growing damage caused by a warming world.

“Damages from lack of action on climate change are growing faster than predicted,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. “We need to act fast, on all fronts, to get the mitigation we need to avoid catastrophic impacts.”

Melting snow and ice in the Arctic is predicted to cause up to 5 feet of sea level rise by the end of the century, according to a new study released last week by the International Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP). This is more than two and a half times higher than the sea level rise projected in 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

“The largest and most permanent bodies of ice in the Arctic – multiyear sea ice, mountain glaciers, ice caps and the Greenland Ice Sheet – have all been declining faster since 2000 than they did in the previous decade,” according to the Arctic study. “The Arctic Ocean is projected to become nearly ice-free in summer within this century, likely within the next thirty to forty years.”

Arctic ice is a defensive shield that is reflecting incoming solar radiation back into space. When it melts, it exposes darker ocean and land that absorbs rather than reflects the radiation. This could lead to run-away feedbacks as accelerating Arctic warming melts more of the region's permafrost. The permafrost line is already

moving north at a rapid rate—in Russia by 19-50 miles (30 to 80 km) during 1970-2005 and in Canada by 81 miles (130 km) during the past 50 years. This in turn releases both CO₂ and methane, an even more powerful climate pollutant. The thaw and decay of permafrost is irreversible and will require larger reductions in CO₂ emissions to stay within the 2°C guardrail.

In addition to cutting CO₂ emissions, there are significant climate mitigation opportunities from reducing other climate forcers, including black carbon, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), methane, and tropospheric ozone as a complement to CO₂ reductions. These non-CO₂ forcers stay in the atmosphere for a matter of days to two to three decades, compared with CO₂, which remains for a century to many thousands of years.

Cutting the non-CO₂ climate pollutants can cut the rate of Arctic warming by two-thirds, and cut global warming in half for the next 30 to 60 years, assuming CO₂ cuts also are made.

For example, phasing out the production and use of HFCs under the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty can produce enormous climate benefits. The Federated States of Micronesia submitted a proposal last week to amend the Montreal Protocol to phase down production and consumption of HFCs. The United States, Canada, and Mexico also filed a similar joint proposal last week to phase down HFCs.

The climate benefit of the island's HFC strategy would be up to 100 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent before 2050. This compares to the 5 to 10 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent that the Kyoto Protocol is striving to achieve during its first commitment period. The cost could be as little as US \$0.10 per tonne of CO₂-equivalent in public funds.

Cutting non-CO₂ climate forcers is critical for protecting vulnerable peoples and ecosystems such as small island countries, and for reducing the risk of passing temperature tipping points for irreversible and abrupt climate changes such as the loss of the Arctic.

“Targeting HFCs under the Montreal Protocol is a unique opportunity that can be implemented quickly, successfully, at low cost, and will produce mitigation,” added Zaelke. “The world desperately needs this kind of action now.”

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American's Climate Choices:

<http://americasclimatechoices.org/>