THE WHITE HOUSE
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FACT SHEET: Initiative to Reduce Black Carbon Emissions Affecting the Arctic

Today in Copenhagen, on behalf of President Obama, Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, announced the Administration's intention to commit $5 million towards international cooperation to reduce black carbon emissions in and around the Arctic. Science shows that these emissions play a significant role in warming the Arctic and accelerating ice melt. The United States invites other nations to join the initiative to fund and implement the necessary mitigation efforts, which will help reduce Arctic warming while yielding significant direct public health and ecosystem benefits.

Black Carbon

Black carbon, or soot, is composed of fine particles that are produced from the incomplete combustion of diesel fuel, wood, crop waste and other biomass, oil, refuse, and, in some cases, coal. Black carbon pollution has well known and significant adverse impacts on human health.

Strong evidence indicates that black carbon contributes to climate change by warming the atmosphere and by darkening the surface of snow and ice, speeding melting. Recent studies have suggested that black carbon may be responsible for 30-50 percent of observed warming in the Arctic. Unlike long-lived greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, black carbon's warming effects are short-lived, and therefore reductions in emissions will help mitigate Arctic warming in the near term.

While U.S. air quality regulations for fine particles have largely controlled black carbon emissions from industrial and other stationary sources, recent regulations have targeted diesel engines, which are the dominant source of remaining black carbon in the United States. U.S. standards for fine particle emissions from new highway diesels are reducing black carbon emissions from these engines by 90 percent or more. Similar emissions standards have been adopted for new off-road diesel engines, including locomotives, and thousands of older diesel vehicles have been retrofitted with particle filters.

A Priority for the Arctic

In launching the new initiative, Chair Sutley cited the 2009 Tromsø Declaration of the Arctic Council, in which the eight member nations recognized that black carbon and other "short-lived climate forcers," including methane and tropospheric ozone, may pose a particular threat to the Arctic, and that reducing these forcers has "*the potential to slow the rate of Arctic snow, sea ice and sheet ice melting in the near-term.*" The Arctic Council further decided "*to establish a task force on short-lived climate forcers to identify existing and new measures to reduce emissions of these forcers and recommend further immediate actions that can be taken.*"

The United States views protection of the Arctic environment as an urgent priority. For this reason we strongly supported the Tromsø Declaration statements on short-lived climate forcers, and we immediately volunteered to co-chair, with Norway, the new Arctic Council task force. Today's announcement further demonstrates the Administration's resolve on this issue and is intended to jump-start international collaboration.

In this vein, Chair Sutley said that she is encouraged that Norway and Sweden have already expressed interest in participating in the context of Arctic Council cooperation. Different financial instruments managed by Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) could possibly contribute to and co-finance development and implementation of appropriate energy efficiency, clean technology, and transportation related projects.

The New Initiatives

The new initiative will include investments 1) to fill information gaps, 2) to identify barriers to implementation and develop approaches to overcome them, 3) to demonstrate technological and non-technological mitigation options, and 4) where possible, to lay the groundwork to quantify the climate and public health benefits of black carbon mitigation strategies. The initiative is expected to focus on the following sources of black carbon: on-road and non-road diesel engines, including those used for port operations, older district heating and industrial facilities, and agricultural and forest fires.

Emissions from international shipping

In launching the new initiative, Chair Sutley further noted that the United States will work in the International Maritime Organization with other interested Parties to address particulate emissions from international shipping that contribute to Arctic warming.

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