

# The Washington Post

## New front opens in war against global warming

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Monday, November 29, 2010; 8:16 PM



Many policymakers and business leaders have come to see the most basic method of slowing [global warming](#)- cutting carbon dioxide emissions through a binding treaty - as elusive for now. They are turning their attention instead toward a more achievable goal: curbing other greenhouse gases that are warming the planet.

As the annual meeting of the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) kicked off Monday in Cancun, Mexico, with the aim of laying the groundwork for a future pact, many experts focused on more immediate cuts in industrial chemicals, soot and methane, all of which contribute to short-term warming.

[Rafe Pomerance](#), a senior fellow at Clean Air-Cool Planet, said a campaign to reduce these non-carbon dioxide emissions "can provide momentum that the world needs on significant greenhouse gas cuts."

The United States, Canada and Mexico will launch as early as this week a North American initiative to curb hydrofluorocarbons, which are used as industrial refrigerants, along with methane and the black carbon that comes from some diesel engines and wood-fired stoves. And U.N. negotiators in

Cancun will press for the adoption of language next week that would ease the way for phasing out HFCs under a separate climate treaty.

In another sign of movement in this direction, 400 major companies including Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Unilever and WalMart announced Monday that they would stop using HFCs in new equipment by 2015.

[Daniel A. Reifsnyder](#), deputy assistant secretary of state for environment, said he and other senior U.S. officials think they can reduce these greenhouse gases - which do not remain in the atmosphere as long as carbon dioxide - even as they continue to chip away at the larger problem of emissions from factories and vehicles.

"We think we have a huge potential to do something about this very quickly," Reifsnyder said in an interview. "If we act today, we could head off a problem that will be 20 percent of the greenhouse gas problem by 2050."

These emissions come from many sources and have different effects on climate, but eliminating them could delay warming by as many as 40 years, according to Durwood Zaelke, president of the [Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development](#), a Washington-based nonprofit organization.

"It's the biggest, fastest insurance policy we can buy while we figure out how to solve the carbon dioxide problem," Zaelke said in a phone interview from Cancun.

Methane, for example, the second most common greenhouse gas, has a much larger effect on climate per ton than carbon dioxide in the short term, but is not released in as large a quantity and dissipates more rapidly.

Phasing out the HFCs used in everything from vending machines to air conditioners could cut the equivalent of 88 million tons of carbon dioxide and account for as much as 8 percent of greenhouse gas reductions needed by midcentury.

Environmental groups such as [Greenpeace](#) and the World Wildlife Fund have been lobbying global corporations for years to cut their carbon output, in part by substituting natural refrigerants such as hydrocarbons and ammonia. Greenpeace solutions director Amy Larkin, whose group developed the first hydrocarbon refrigerator in 1992, hailed the Consumer Goods Forum's announcement to phase out artificial refrigerants as "an important first step, and will pave the way for major changes across the industry."

Coca-Cola spokeswoman Lisa Manley said that although natural refrigerants are more expensive than traditional ones, company officials hope the new pledge will cut costs by bringing "scope and scale to this commitment." Coca-Cola started installing HFC-free insulation in its equipment in 2006 and has spent \$60 million on research and development into HFC alternatives.

Globally, HFC emissions are on the rise, in part because HFCs serve as a substitute for ozone-depleting chemicals already eliminated under the 1987 [Montreal Protocol](#) and are popular in developing countries such as India. Policymakers from areas ranging from the Federated States of Micronesia to the European Union are hoping to capitalize on the Cancun talks to press for more aggressive international action, with a proposal to control the production and consumption of HFCs under the Montreal Protocol while keeping emissions of these chemicals under the purview of the U.N. climate talks.

"We fear that the current international framework cannot address this risk in an effective and efficient manner," wrote Marios Avraamides, a transport and ozone expert in the European

Commission's climate action division, in an e-mail. Coordinating efforts between the two climate treaties, he added, "represents an opportunity for rapid, effective climate mitigation action."

In the meantime, members of the Arctic Council - which includes five Scandinavian nations and the United States, Canada and Russia - are exploring how to curb black carbon. Soot is a public health threat and it absorbs sunlight when deposited on snow and ice, which accelerates warming and glacier melt.

Frederik Hannerz, head of the Swedish Environment Ministry's division for environmental quality, said in an interview that the importance of reducing black carbon "is only emerging through the science in recent years. We now see the potential in this area, both from a health perspective and a climate perspective."

The Arctic Council has established a task force on the issue, and member nations such as [Sweden](#) are looking into funding projects ranging from retrofitting diesel vehicles to reducing agricultural burning.

Even as the buzz among delegates in Cancun was about the prospect of progress on lesser-known greenhouse gases, experts emphasized that policymakers must focus on the broader goal of curbing carbon emissions from industrial activities, transportation and deforestation.

"It should never take attention away from the long-term goal of a climate agreement," Hannerz said.

Still, Zaelke said he was gratified to see "the pieces coming together" on an issue that could rebuild trust between industrialized and developing nations when it comes to climate change. "I think it can be a game-changer to help unravel the knot here," he said.