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New National Climate Assessment Cries Out for Fast Climate Mitigation

Climate Impacts Costing U.S. \$100 Billion A Year

Fast cuts to HFCs, methane, and black carbon essential

Washington, DC, 6 May 2014 – The last decade has been the hottest on record in the U.S., periods of extreme heat now last longer than any living American has ever experienced, rainfall is becoming both more intense and more erratic, and sea-level rise and storm surges threaten thousands of coastal communities. According to the third [U.S. National Climate Assessment](#) released by the Obama Administration today, these and many more crippling impacts of climate change are being felt in every part of the U.S., with staggering human and economic costs.

“The findings of this Assessment cry out for fast climate mitigation,” stated Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. “Fast action to reduce short-lived climate pollutants including HFCs, methane, tropospheric ozone, and black carbon can cut the rate of global warming in half over the next several decades and is essential for reducing near-term impacts with continuing climate benefits through the end of the century.”

The 1,300 page report compiled by 300 leading scientists and experts is meant to be the definitive account of the effects of climate change in the U.S., and confirms what many already know, that “[c]limate change, once considered an issue for a distant future, has moved firmly into the present.” Climate and weather disasters cost the U.S. economy more than \$100 billion in 2012 and without fast action mitigation, the Assessment warns, temperatures in the U.S. could rise another two degrees Fahrenheit over the next few decades, producing increasingly severe climate impacts, as well as harming public health, and reducing agricultural production.

The Obama Administration isn’t waiting to take action to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. This past June Obama released his [Climate Action Plan](#) laying out a sophisticated blend of strategies designed to produce climate benefits immediately, like the phase down of HFC coolants and reductions in methane emissions, while also addressing CO₂ emissions which are critical for long-term climate stabilization. In 2011 the Administration finalized some of the toughest fuel economy standards in the world for heavy-duty trucks, buses, and vans, and light-duty passenger vehicles. And just last week the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Environmental Protection Agency’s authority to establish and enforce air pollution standards, including CO₂ controls, for coal power plants.

As a result of these and similar efforts, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions fell by 3.4% in 2012, their lowest levels since 1994. While total emissions fell in 2012, emissions of the super greenhouse gas HFCs increased nearly 4%. HFCs are the fastest growing greenhouse gases in the U.S. and many other countries, and are being addressed in the U.S. through the EPA’s Significant New Alternatives Policy (SNAP) Program.

“Phasing down emissions of HFCs is the fastest and cheapest climate mitigation opportunity available to the U.S. and the world,” Zaelke added. “The E.U. just approved new f-gas regulations expected to cut HFCs by 80% by 2030. The U.S. is beginning to make significant progress to cut climate emissions, but there is still a long way to go. Now it’s time for a global agreement to phase out HFCs under the Montreal Protocol.” HFCs and other short-lived pollutants were a central part of the UN Secretary-General’s meeting in Abu Dhabi this week, called the “ascent” as it paves the way for climate summit in New York in September. More than 100 ministers attended the Abu Dhabi meeting.

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