

UNEP-ESCAP SRO-ENEA Consultation Meeting on Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs) in North-East Asia

7 February 2013, SRO-ENEA Office

The UNEP and ESCAP SRO-ENEA had a consultation meeting to discuss Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (SLCP), which lie at the interface of air pollution and climate change. While it was a ground-level meeting of considering the issue of SLCP, this was a natural continuation of the work undertaken by NEASPEC on transboundary air pollution (TAP). The meeting was attended by Mr. Joseph Alcamo, Chief Scientist of UNEP and Mr. Ramakrishna, Director of SRO-ENEA and selected resource persons from member States.

SLCP, including black carbon, methane, tropospheric ozone, and HFCs, contribute to global warming but are in the atmosphere for a short period of time – less than ten years or in a matter of few days for black carbon. By 2030, if proper actions are taken, SLCP reduction can lead to worldwide reduction in premature mortalities due to outdoor air pollution (2.4 million per year), reduction in crop damage (32 million tons per year), and halving of the temperature rise of the reference scenario for 2010-2050. Although SLCP slows down the near term global warming, CO₂ reduction will still remain essential for long-term climate protection. Necessary actions on SLCP include national solution for reducing obvious emissions, regional action for intervening on the traveling black carbon, and global action for financing mitigation efforts. One of global processes is the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which was created by UNEP in 2012 to focus on information exchange and fast action on SLCP via 5 priority areas: diesel vehicles, brick production, landfills, HFC alternative technologies, and oil and natural gas production.

In North-East Asia, huge coal consumption is a big part of the picture: Mongolia currently relies on coal-fired power plants for 98 percent of electricity though the total combined capacity of seven power plants is only 836MW. In Ulaanbaatar, half of residents living in Ger and poor emission standards also contribute to high black carbon concentration. In China, according to a study in 2006, the total black carbon emissions in 2000 accounted for 1.5 billion ton which could be almost twice of total emissions from Europe. The study also reveals that coal consumption occupies about 68 percent of the total black carbon emissions. Considering the heavy impacts of fine particulate matters (PM) (of which black carbon is a constituent) on health, in particular, respiratory organs, policy measures for targeting the reduction of black carbon is an important priority for many North-East Asian countries. Besides black carbon, serious surface ozone pollution is calling for prioritizing reduction of NO_x and VOCs - the major precursors to ozone. Ongoing research topics included supplying gasified coal, testing the least polluting type of coal, better understanding the indirect effects of SLCP, and exploring co-benefit approaches. Countries were already conducting joint research activities through the Atmospheric Brown Clouds project. However, there is a great need to expand regional-level studies, bring science and policy together for tackling SLCP, and build a strategic link between national actions on air pollution and climate change for cost-effective responses.

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