



UNEP RONA

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2013



99% of glacial ice is contained within vast ice sheets in the polar regions

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- 22-23 January, 2013 - Working Meeting for the Black Carbon Emissions Reductions from

Heavy Duty Vehicles and Engines Initiative under the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (CCAC), Hosted by Environment Canada.

- 1 February, 2013 - "Reducing Short-Lived Climate Pollutants: An International Response for Fast-Action Climate Mitigation," UNEP and the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EES).



Climate change study shows an increase in natural disasters in North America



Map shows the insurance costs from extreme weather disasters over the period of 2011–2012 in the U.S. Among the most costly were droughts and hurricanes.
Graphic courtesy: Ceres

In a report released by Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurance firm, it has been shown that natural disasters are increasing most drastically in North America and includes rising rates of hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, heat waves and drought. The study links these increases to climate change, and predicts more ahead. Insured losses in the United States from thunderstorms alone in 2011 were an estimated \$26 billion, the highest on record so far and double the previous record in 2010. The costliest disasters in the United States since 1980 as defined by insured losses were Hurricane Katrina in 2005, costing \$62 billion, and Hurricane Ike in 2008, which cost \$18 billion.

Obama Signs e-Manifest Bill on Hazardous Waste



Hazardous waste takes many forms.
Photo: Halton.ca

President Obama signed into law legislation that will significantly change how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tracks hazardous waste. The new law directs the EPA to establish an electronic manifest system, which will replace the carbon-copy manifests previously utilized by the EPA and state regulators. The bill passed through Senate in August, and the House

cleared a slightly amended version in September, which was then approved again by the Senate. The Congressional Budget Office said the system would cost U.S. \$15 million to set up, and EPA would bring in U.S. \$12 million from user fees collected from industry.

Environmentalists believe EPA, not Capitol Hill, will be focal point for climate action in the U.S.

Environmentalists are hoping that President Obama's reelection will free the US EPA to move ahead regulations on carbon tax and related issues on climate change. Leaders of several prominent environmental groups said they expected direction on climate change to come from the White House and EPA in the near future, and not from Congress.

According to three surveys belief in climate change climbs among Americans

Pew Research Center

A new Pew Research Center survey shows that about 67 percent of Americans believe temperatures are rising, marking a slow but persistent rebound from the 2009 freefall in public opinion around climate change. The growing acceptance was reflected across all age groups and political affiliations, including amongst those often deemed more skeptical such as senior citizens and Republicans. About 42 percent of those who support one-time Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney believe temperatures are rising, and 18 percent say it is mostly caused by humans, the poll says. Alternatively, 88 percent of Obama supporters say there's warming, and 63 percent point to human activity as the main reason. Pew surveyed 1,511 people in October 2012.

Rasmussen Poll

More than two-thirds of U.S. voters say they feel climate change is a serious problem but are less certain about its causes than they were a few months ago, according to a Rasmussen poll. An all-time high of 68 percent of respondents said global warming is at least a somewhat serious problem, including 38 percent who said it is "very serious." The survey of 1,000 likely voters was conducted November 5, a day ahead of Election Day. However, when asked if warming was caused "primarily by human activity" rather than by "long-term planetary trends," 41 percent said human emissions were the cause, down from 48 percent in July. Thirty-eight percent of November's respondents said the warming of the Earth had natural causes, while 44 percent of July's respondents said the same thing. Furthermore, the Rasmussen poll showed much more skepticism about climate change being caused by human activity than a poll released last month by Yale and George Mason universities, which found that a majority of Americans -- 54 percent -- believe global warming is caused mostly by human activities.



In second term Obama faces political challenges in environmental policy

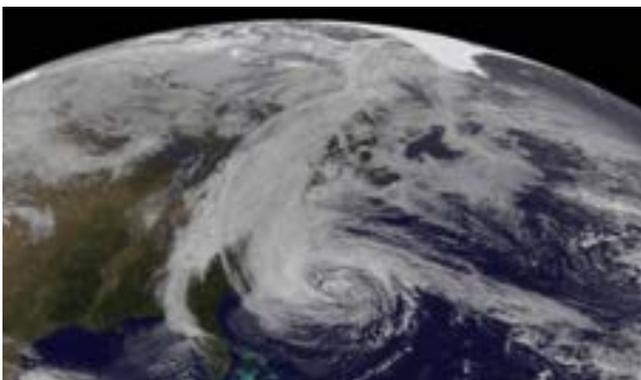
“We want our children to live in an America that isn’t burdened by debt, that isn’t weakened by inequality, that isn’t threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet,” Obama told his supporters in Chicago in his acceptance speech following his re-election as President of the United States. This statement signals that climate change will remain a topic of concern going forward for the Obama administration in next four years.

SuperStorm Sandy Raises Climate Change Political Profile

Hurricane Sandy, a massive superstorm, made landfall on the northeastern shores of the United States on October 29 after blowing through six Caribbean nations. Sandy brought strong winds and storm surges, flooding residential and commercial sections of New York City and the New Jersey shoreline. Over eight million households lost power in the northeastern United States and some 200 people lost their lives to Sandy-related causes, from the Caribbean northward.

The storm did bring good news on the political front in terms of the climate change discussion in the United States. Some state-level officials tied the storm to a need to address global warming. Climate change had mostly been a dormant issue going into the 2012 U.S. presidential election – with the topic left unmentioned at the presidential debates for the first time since 1988. However, the damage left in hurricane Sandy’s wake finally raised the issue just a week before Election Day. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (Independent) and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (Democrat) both cited Sandy as evidence of climate change.

At a rally just after Sandy hit the East coast, Obama said: “... I don’t want to subsidize oil company profits. I want to support the energy jobs of tomorrow, the new technologies that will cut our oil imports in half, take some of the carbon out of the atmosphere.”



NOAA’s GOES-13 satellite captured this image of Hurricane Sandy on October 28. Sandy’s western cloud edge can already be seen over the mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States. Credit: NASA GOES

According to three surveys belief in climate change climbs among Americans (continued)

Yale and George Mason Universities Study

Nearly three-quarters of Americans say global warming influences U.S. weather and made this year’s record-hot summer worse, a survey conducted by Yale and George Mason universities this Fall. The survey found that 74 per cent of Americans believe global warming is having a marked effect on weather—up five percentage points since March 2012. The attitude change is in line with this year’s weather events throughout the central part of the country, where extraordinary summer heat accompanied drought that was the worst in more than half a century. Yale’s principal investigator on the project, Anthony Leiserowitz, said given record-breaking weather over the last two years, some respondents have started “connecting the dots” between extreme events and global warming. He acknowledged that a cool autumn and snowy winter might influence future responses.





Canadian budget cuts trim stratospheric ozone science and monitoring

This fall, cuts to Environment Canada programs responsible for ozone science and monitoring were announced — from \$13.3 million in 2012 to \$31.1 million in 2013. All of the staff in the Ministry's ozone group has been re-assigned. A spokesman for Environment Canada said the Ministry remains involved in a continuing research involvement working with the World Meteorological Organization and others, and that the research will provide the scientific basis for services to Canadians.

Lawsuit brought against Government over Northern Gateway Pipeline

On September 26, conservation groups released a copy of the lawsuit against the Federal government of Canada due to Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline and its threat to endangered species. Environmental groups including the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, the David Suzuki Foundation, Greenpeace Canada, Sierra Club, Wildsight and EcoJustice Canada claim that the Environment Minister is violating the federal Species at Risk Act by failing to publish a final recovery plan for endangered species. The lawsuit will try to force Ottawa to protect endangered and threatened species along the proposed route of the Northern Gateway pipeline and its shipping route. The activist groups are filing for judicial review in the cases of the Pacific humpback whale, the Nechako white sturgeon, the marbled murrelet and the southern mountain caribou.



The Pacific humpback and southern mountain caribou are among those listed on the Species at Risk Act in Canada.

Canada to roll out new emissions standards

The Canadian government plans to unveil regulations to boost vehicle fuel efficiency and to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. Environment Minister Peter Kent says the new rules will mean cars and light trucks rolling off the line in 2025 would consume half the amount of fuel and emit half the greenhouse gases compared to 2008 models. The regulations are designed to model U.S. legislation introduced over a year ago.

Canada pledges to help clean Nigeria Ogoniland

Canada promises to assist in the clean-up of Nigeria's Ogoniland. Canada's High Commissioner to Nigeria, Chris Cooter, stated that his country will actively participate in the Ogoniland oil spill clean-up following UNEP's report calling for such action. The High Commissioner said that some Canadian companies will soon come to Nigeria to discuss how they will assist in the clean-up of polluted sites and promised that Canada will continue to stand by the Ogoni people in their quest for a safer environment. The UNEP report stated that the area, situated around the Niger Delta wetlands, needed the world's biggest ever oil clean-up, taking at least 25 years and costing an initial \$1 billion.

Canadians take over chairmanship of Arctic Council

Although Minister of Foreign Affairs John Baird will continue to lead Canada's foreign policy with respect to the Arctic, Minister of Health Leona Aglukkaq, an Inuk, will chair the Arctic Council for 2013–2015. Aglukkaq is seen as the Ambassador for the Arctic. The country's Senior Arctic Official post has not yet been designated and is being filled on an acting basis by diplomat Sigrid Anna Johnson. The Foreign Ministry is currently conducting consultations in Canada on potential priorities for the Council's future program.



Leona Aglukkaq, was elected chair of the Arctic Council. She also serves as Canada's federal health minister and minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

Photo: Conservative Party of Canada

RONA Hosts Sustainable Consumption and Production Workshop

The North American Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption (NARSPAC) and UNEP RONA hosted the “Advancing Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) in North America” workshop on December 11 and 12 in Washington, D.C. The workshop provided an opportunity for stakeholders engaged in advancing SCP to share strategies and initiatives being undertaken in the region and to discuss future opportunities for collaboration and potential next steps. A key focus of the meeting was the recent adoption of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on SCP at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which has provided a number of opportunities to highlight SCP-related issues and expand related networks. Participants represented a wide range of institutions, including the US and Canadian governments, civil society, academia, the private sector and international organizations. The results of the meeting were shared at the North American Major Groups and Stakeholders consultation which was held in Washington, D.C. the following day.

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RONA Holds Annual North American Major Groups and Stakeholders Consultation



Attendees at the 2012 North American Major Groups and Stakeholders Consultation hosted by RONA at World Resources Institute listen to RONA Director Amy Fraenkel speak. Photo: Emily Werner/UNEP RONA

The annual North American Major Groups and Stakeholders Consultation was held on 12 and 13 December at the World Resources Institute (WRI) in Washington, D.C. The event drew more than 60 participants representing a range of constituencies from the region. The programme included briefings on important issues for UNEP, including post Rio+20 processes and UNEP’s Program of Work and Medium Term Strategy, as well as ample opportunity for discussion, in both plenary and small group settings. The consultation included a Keynote video address from Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, in which he talked about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015

development Agenda. During the ensuing discussion, participants urged the U.N. to develop a new concept of sustainable development that acknowledges planetary limits and provides a truly integrated systemic approach to development, focusing on sustainable living systems and well-being. Participants strongly expressed the view that the SDGs should be integrated with the development of the post-2015 development goals and that ultimately there be one set of global goals with sustainability as a core tenet for each. The outcomes of the consultation include: (1) a Key Messages document (posted on RONA’s website at http://www.rona.unep.org/partnerships/civil_society_involvement.html); (2) the selection of two regional representatives (Diallo Shabazz from Radical Ideas, LLC and Maggie Comstock from the U.S. Green Building Council); and (3) Conference Report (forthcoming).



RONA and NRDC Convene Workshop on how to Prevent Marine Litter at Source

On December 3rd, RONA and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) brought together a group of more than 50 experts and key stakeholders from government, the business sector and non-governmental organizations from the U.S. and Canada to discuss lessons learned and next steps for preventing the occurrence of marine litter at the source, while focusing on upstream reduction approaches. This one-day workshop, entitled *Legal, Policy and Market-based Approaches to Preventing Marine Litter at the Source*, was held simultaneously via video conference in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, California – with additional participants attending via webinar. The presentations and discussions focused on how to improve the design and production of goods and packaging, fostering changes in consumption, improving waste management and storm water management. An analytical summary of the meeting will be available in April 2013.

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Bayer USA and UNEP Promote International Children's Painting Competition



In partnership with Bayer, RONA is again promoting UNEP's International Children's Painting Competition in the region. Now in its 22nd year, the competition is open to children between the ages of 6 and 14, and entries must be received by March 15, 2013. This year's theme is *Water: Where Does It Come From?*

For more information visit www.unep.org/rona or contact: daiva.kacenauskaite@unep.org

Convention on Migratory Species Officer-in-Charge Bert Lenten Visits Washington

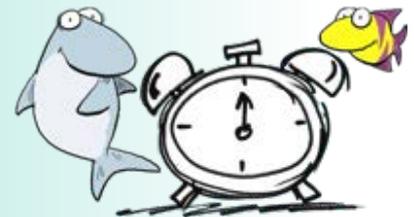
From 26 to 30 November, Bert Lenten, Officer-in-Charge of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) spent a week in the U.S. Capital to meet with representatives of government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The purpose of the visit was to seek additional U.S. support for the implementation of activities by CMS. Mr. Lenten's held high-level meetings with 14 organizations, including: the U.S. State Department Bureau of Oceans, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Organization of American States (OAS), National Geographic Society, Defenders of Wildlife and Shark Advocates International. In addition, Mr. Lenten made a presentation at two well-attended NGO briefings: one on CMS marine species hosted by RONA, and the other on avian and terrestrial migratory species hosted by the U.S. Forest Service. Attendance at these meetings indicated the strong interest by the various stakeholders in the region that there is a need for even more collaboration between CMS and RONA going forward.

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Volunteers from UNEP RONA's office attend the International Coastal Cleanup event September 14 along the Anacostia River, in Washington D.C.
Credit: UNEP RONA

UNEP Launches Video on Marine Litter at Ocean Conservancy Annual Coastal Cleanup



UNEP RONA and cartoonist Jim Toomey have teamed up to produce a multi-part series of short animated videos on ocean health called "Two Minutes on Oceans with Jim Toomey."

Illustration courtesy: Jim Toomey

Ocean Conservancy's annual International Cleanup Campaign (ICC), held in Washington, D.C. on September 15, served as a launching pad for the video on marine litter—the second in the **Two Minutes on Oceans with Jim Toomey** series. This latest video highlights the negative impact that trash, discarded upstream, has on our oceans and coastal ecosystems. A number of UNEP staff took part in the clean-up exercise, including RONA Director Amy Fraenkel, STAP Secretary Thomas Hammond, Programme Officer Carla Friedrich and communications intern Kelly Zenkewich. They joined more than 100 other participants in Washington D.C. on September 15. In her welcoming remarks, Amy Fraenkel highlighted UNEP's efforts to reduce marine litter. Other speakers included representatives from Ocean Conservancy, NOAA, EPA, Coca Cola and the Anacostia Watershed. To watch the videos, go to: www.unep.org/rona/toomey.

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OAS and UNEP inaugural meeting of the International Advisory Council for the Advancement of Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Stability

On 7 December the Organization of American States (OAS) and UNEP held the first meeting of the International Advisory Council for the Advancement of Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Stability in Washington, D.C. The Council, comprising senior legal and environmental authorities and experts from around the world, will act as a global voice for environmental sustainability, giving guidance to UNEP, the OAS and other organizations on the implementation of the Rio+20 Declaration on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Stability.

UNEP's Deputy Executive Director Amina Mohamed and Sherry Tross, Executive Secretary for Integral Development of the OAS, opened the morning and afternoon sessions respectively. Justices, lawyers and others who attended include: Rt. Hon. Mr. Tun Arifin bin Zakaria, Chief Justice of Malaysia; Hon. Mr. Antonio Herman Benjamin, Judge of the High Court of Brazil; Prof. Edith Brown Weiss, Francis Cabell Brown Professor of International Law, Georgetown University; Justice Winston Anderson, Justice, Caribbean Court of Justice; Mr. Scott Fulton, General legal Counsel, U.S. EPA; and Mr. Scott Vaughan, Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Canada. The Council comprising Chief Justices, Attorneys General and Chief Prosecutors, Auditors General, government ministers and other members of the global legal community was called for at Rio+20 last June.

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Attendees at the inaugural meeting of the International Advisory Council for Advancement of Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Stability are pictured on the steps of the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C. on 7 December.

Photo: Kelly Zenkewich/UNEP RONA

Extreme weather may increase hostility amongst humans

A new study from Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences looks at ways the Earth's changing climate affects humans' willingness to fight. Using databases of instances of violence ranging from election violence to cattle raids in East African countries over a 19-year period analyzed against temperature and precipitation records, a clear relationship emerged. It was demonstrated that warmer temperatures raised the risk of conflict, while wetter conditions lowered that risk. Many scientists, politicians and military leaders have warned that climate change could exacerbate existing tensions in the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries, where a shift to more extreme weather patterns could lead to agricultural collapse and resource wars.

Map reveals Earth's capacity for CO2 absorption

Researchers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the U.K. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology have mapped the planet's plant life in an attempt to understand carbon sinks. The map, made to understand how plant growth is limited by nutrients in the soil, could help scientists improve estimates of how much CO₂ is absorbed by plants in so-called "carbon sinks." The map also illustrates variation around the globe in key areas like the Amazon, developed and developing countries, as well as various types of ecosystems such as croplands, grasslands and tropical and boreal forests. The study was published in the journal *Global Biogeochemical Cycles*.



Humans playing a role in changing ocean salinity

A recent study by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography suggests that man-made greenhouse gases are responsible for changes in the salinity of the ocean. Researchers found that parts of the ocean are getting saltier due to increased evaporation, while fresher areas are becoming more diluted from increased rainfall, faster than expected. Variation in ocean salinity impacts marine life and the global water cycle, changing rainfall patterns and evaporation on land. Researchers admit that natural variations like El Niño, solar fluctuations and volcanic eruptions could be playing a role, but it appears that anthropogenic effects are having the strongest impact on the salinity.

Study shows increase in carbon dioxide could accelerate cracking of glacier ice

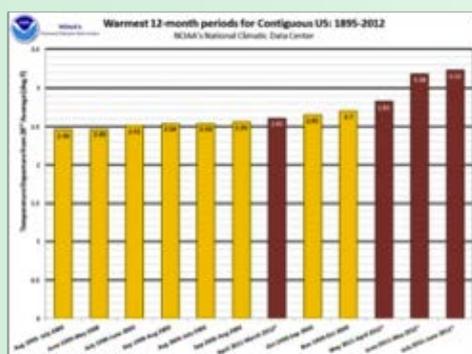
New research suggests that there is a different way increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide can impact Earth's glacial ice, by weakening the strength and structure of ice. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) computer simulations indicate that exposing ice to increasing levels of CO₂ may decrease the ice's material strength and fracture resistance on an atomic level. This appears to be due to the breaking of hydrogen bonds between water molecules in ice, creating a more brittle ice which could accelerate the melting of glaciers. The findings were published in *Journal of Physics D: Applied Physics*.



Climate change may be faster than most current computer model projections

An analysis published in the November edition of the journal *Science* states that climate change is likely to be worse than what most computer models have projected, based on evidence that the Earth's climate is more sensitive to carbon dioxide amounts in the atmosphere than previously suggested. The new prediction means warming could come on faster, be more intense and that related impacts such as drought, sea level rise and extreme weather events could come earlier and hit harder than previously thought. The new model examines the behavior of clouds in terms of temperature sensitivity estimates. Clouds can heat or cool the atmosphere, depending on factors such as location and structure. However, scientists have always had difficulty estimating cloud behavior in models, mostly due to lack of data on cloud behavior. The researchers used 16 global climate models to reproduce recent satellite observations of relative humidity in the tropics—a quantity tied to cloud formation. When the scientists compared the output of climate models with a decade of satellite measurements of relative humidity, they found that the models that best reproduced observed conditions were built on the premise that climate sensitivity is relatively high—7 degrees F or more. This suggests that warming may be higher than the most recent estimates in 2007 from a report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of 3.6 to 8.1 degrees F, with a best guess of 5.4 degrees.

September ends warmest 12 months on record



The NOAA State of the Climate figures show that September 2012 data caps off the warmest 12 months on record, with the previous 16 months recording above average temperatures for the first time ever. Signs point to long term trends related to global warming. In addition, record levels of dryness were recorded in the northern plains, northern Rockies and northwest, with September being the third most active

on record for wildfires in the region. NOAA also reported that its Climate Extremes Index shows that if you leave out hurricane activity, 2012 to date has been the most extreme year in climate since this sort of record began to be compiled in 1910.



Sea ice is frozen seawater that floats on the ocean surface. It forms in both the Arctic and the Antarctic during each hemisphere's winter and retreats, but does not completely disappear, in the summer. It plays an important role for the climate and ecosystems.

Arctic wind patterns may have triggered record low summer sea ice

U.S. scientists say unusual air pressure patterns over the Arctic during the month of June in recent years have altered wind patterns in the region, funneling warmer air into the Arctic and contributing to record low Arctic summer sea ice extent from 2007 to 2012. A team of researchers in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, showed how the formation of two high pressure areas above the Arctic disrupted westerly winds, creating an unusually strong flow of warm southerly air, which send more warm air to the central Arctic and Greenland. This air may have contributed to unusually dramatic summer thaws starting in 2007. While it is unclear why these unusual patterns of high pressure have occurred in each of the last six Junes, NOAA believes it may be related to declining snow cover in the Canadian Arctic in recent years.

Coral reefs on way to extinction without global action, study says



In a study published in *Nature Climate Change* journal, it was revealed that current global commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions may not be enough to save coral reefs. It was projected that even limiting the temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius may still result in a degradation of 70% of corals by 2030. Increasing acidification of the ocean contributes to coral bleaching, which eventually kills the coral. Although known for their natural beauty, reefs serve as shoreline protection and are habitats for some 33% of ocean species, and therefore very important to the global seafood industry.

Antarctic ice may be gaining ice while Arctic is losing it

While the North Pole has been losing sea ice, it appears the South Pole has been gaining it. Antarctic sea ice hit a record 7.51 million square miles in September, just days after reports of the biggest loss of Arctic Sea ice on record. According to climate scientists, shifts in wind patterns and the ozone hole over the Antarctic this time of year—both related to human activity—are behind the increase. Sea ice is always melting near one pole while growing around the other, resulting in the overall trend of dramatically less ice in the Arctic and slightly more in the Antarctic. The Antarctic is also getting snowier because climate change has allowed the air to carry more moisture. Since 1960, temperatures in the Arctic have warmed most of the world's regions, while those in Antarctica have warmed the least, according to NASA data. This phenomenon is most noticeable in September, when northern ice is at its lowest and southern ice at its highest. Over the past 30 years, the Arctic has lost an average of 5.7 square miles of sea ice for every square mile gained in Antarctica during this month.



IV. ON THE CALENDAR



14 January 2013

Panel Discussion in Advance of the First Plenary Meeting of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Co-sponsored by UNEP RONA and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Hosted by the Embassy of France/ Maison Française.

22–23 January 2013



**Environment
Canada**

Working Meeting for the Black Carbon Emissions Reductions from Heavy Duty Vehicles and Engines Initiative under the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (CCAC), Hosted by Environment Canada, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, Ontario.

1 February 2013

“Reducing Short-Lived Climate Pollutants: An International Response for Fast-Action Climate Mitigation,” UNEP and the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI), Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C.



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