

Editorial What about those other greenhouse gases?

By **THE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD**

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The U.N. Climate Summit that starts Tuesday is a precursor to the Paris climate conference scheduled for next year. No treaty will come out of the summit in New York, which is more of a brainstorming and cheerleading session.

But here's one topic we'd like to see the participants discuss, because it has been given short shrift so far in the battle against global warming: what to do about methane, refrigerants and other short-lived climate pollutants. These are pollutants that don't remain in the environment for as long as carbon but are far more powerful at trapping heat. Methane, which is the most abundant and which is emitted from landfills, livestock farms and some oil and gas operations, breaks down after about 50 years, but it is 20 to 30 times more potent at trapping heat. It is believed to be the source of 25% of the Earth's warming.

Yet climate change efforts, including those in California, have been slow to address these powerful short-term gases. Carbon dioxide, after all, is by far the most common and notorious greenhouse gas, the one that stays around for centuries. But it is time to look beyond carbon.

Recent reports note that the Earth's climate is changing faster than originally predicted. Meaningful progress must be made over the next decade or two, not 50 years. Addressing the problem of short-lived climate pollutants could improve the near-term picture in dramatic ways. A 2013 study led by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography found that reductions in methane and three other fast-cycling gases, when combined with efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, could cut the short-term rise in sea levels by 30% or more over 35 years.

Yet California, for all its forward thinking on climate change, allocated no cap-and-trade money specifically to reductions in short-term gases. Livestock operations are the biggest source of methane in California, but the state has not been helping farms and feedlots with the cost of machines, called biodigesters, that can capture methane from manure and turn it into biofuel.

Recently, short-lived gases have been drawing more notice. Last weekend, Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill to regulate some of them. At the climate summit, the Obama administration is expected to call for new efforts to reduce methane emissions by the oil and gas industries, which

appear interested in cooperating. Also, a lot could be achieved simply by sealing oil and gas pipes that now leak methane. Last week, the White House said it would require the phase-out of problematic refrigerants; it already has the support of several large companies.

The summit will, of course, focus largely on reducing carbon dioxide emissions, the only way to combat warming in the long term. But perhaps some attention will be paid as well to the problem of these powerful short-term heat trappers.

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