

UN climate talks plagued by twin fears

September 5 2015, by Marlowe Hood



Science makes it clear that the laissez-faire alternative is a climate-addled future of mega-storms, drought, water wars and mass migration

Negotiators from 195 nations tasked with crafting a universal climate pact are driven by twin fears tugging in opposite directions, which may result in a hollow deal, say analysts.

The all-too-real prospect of [climate](#) catastrophe on a horizon of decades, not centuries, coupled with a rising tide of expectations, would seem to be powerful incentives to forge an agreement that is truly up to the task.

Science makes it clear that the laissez-faire alternative is a climate-addled future of mega-storms, drought, water wars and mass migration.

It is also a reminder that the window of opportunity for acting is barely ajar—if human emissions of heat-trapping [greenhouse gases](#) don't peak very soon and drop very swiftly, it may soon slam shut.

At the same time, however, career diplomats—and their political bosses—working on the nitty-gritty of the deal to be inked in Paris in December are haunted by another fear subtly nudging them in the opposite direction: the fear of failure.

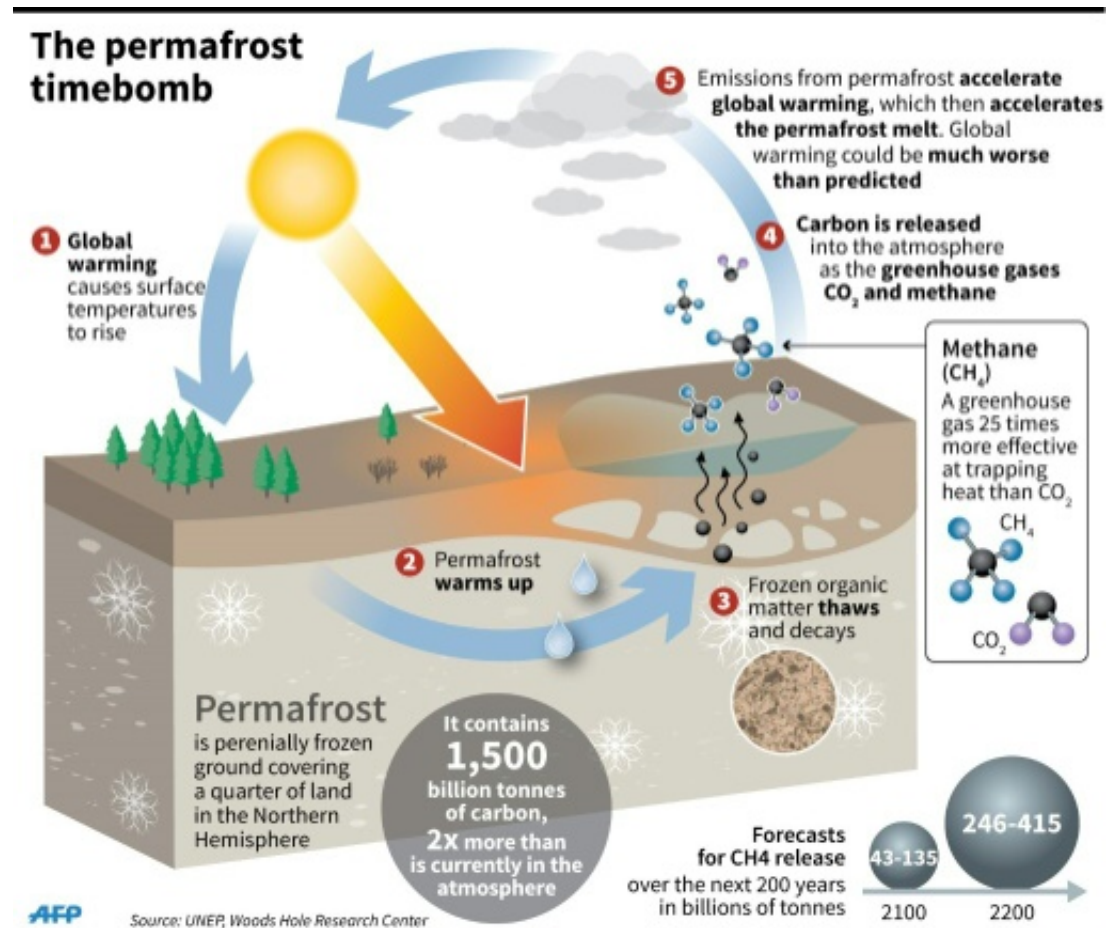
"Our concern is that we will end up with a lowest common denominator, where everybody just agrees on the least ambitious options," said Li Shuo of Greenpeace China.

The last time the world tried to craft a "last chance" universal [climate pact](#)—in Copenhagen, in 2009—it ended in tears, with more than 110 unhappy heads of state scrambling in overtime to piece together a three-page, face-saving "declaration" instead.

"Not repeating the mistakes of Copenhagen" is a common refrain at the talks in Bonn, and something of a mantra for the organisers of the November 30-December 11 conference in the French capital.

And yet, progress has been incremental and painfully slow.

Negotiators left the former East German capital Friday after a week of closed-door meetings with very little to show and a draft agreement "not fit for a negotiation," in the words of the European Commission's top negotiator, Elina Bardram.



Explanation of how permafrost thawing could radically accelerate global warming

Getting ministers involved

But it is unfair, analysts say, to place too much blame on rank-and-file diplomats, themselves deeply frustrated to have made so little headway with only five negotiating days left before the main event in Paris.

Without clear instructions from their [ministers](#) and, at the top of the political food chain, state leaders, they can only go so far in removing the logjams that have beleaguered climate talks for years.

"You have a very tight brief coming here from your ministers and capitals that you can't go beyond," said Alden Meyer, a veteran climate analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"That kind of dynamic can impede creativity and the ability to break through boxes to interesting solutions."

The French hosts have moved aggressively to bridge that gap.

To start, they have enlisted early and often the ministers who will ink the deal in December, with the next "informal" meeting—with some 60 countries in attendance—scheduled for this Sunday and Monday.

Other high-level parlays coming up will give top leaders a chance to narrow the gap on core climate issues, ranging from hundreds of billions of dollars in financing for poor countries to how ambitious the world will be in slashing greenhouse gases.

On September 27, French President Francois Hollande and Ban Ki-moon will host a climate luncheon summit in New York, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

Citation: UN climate talks plagued by twin fears (2015, September 5) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-09-climate-plagued-twin.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.