
Climate Engineering Conference 2017 Opens in Berlin

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The opening of the Climate Engineering Conference 2017 in Berlin. © IASS/Dirk Enters ()

On Monday evening the Climate Engineering Conference (CEC17) was opened in Berlin by Mark Lawrence, Scientific Director at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). The international conference explores the potentials and risks of possible measures to intervene in the climate system. Over four days, experts from academia, political institutions, and civil society are engaging in intensive debates about the study, risks, and governance of geoengineering.

The international community has set itself ambitious climate goals in the Paris Agreement. But how can those goals be achieved? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assumes that in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to almost zero, massive quantities of carbon dioxide will need to be removed from the atmosphere by the year 2100. "It will be very difficult to achieve the Paris Agreement targets without resorting to some form of climate engineering. So we urgently need an open and critical debate on the different forms and consequences of such interventions in the climate system," said Mark Lawrence at the opening of the conference.

A forum for international, critical and transparent exchange

With this in mind, the climate engineering research team at the IASS invited around 250 experts to this year's Climate Engineering Conference in Berlin. "The CEC17 is probably the most important platform for the global, critical, and transparent exchange of ideas on this highly controversial issue," explained Stefan Schäfer, head of the Climate Engineering project at the IASS and one of the conference organisers.

The conference participants include researchers, policymakers and civil society actors, all of whom bring very different views and perspectives to the table. CEC17 brings the scientists conducting research into climate engineering face to face with environmental activists and political actors. Around fifty participants have travelled to the conference from developing countries and emerging economies. They are also due to participate in a meeting of the Solar Radiation Management Governance Initiative (SRMGI) organised on the sidelines of the conference.

Discussion of planned solar radiation management field experiment

The question of whether research should leave the laboratory is a major bone of contention in discussions of geoengineering. At CEC17 Harvard University physicist David Keith will discuss his planned field experiment and the governance activities associated with it (Wednesday at 2 pm).

In over thirty further conference events the focus will be on carbon dioxide removal (CDR) and solar radiation management (SRM) measures. Among other things, participants will discuss whether the Paris Agreement goals can be achieved without climate engineering (Tuesday at 11 am), how climate policy should deal with the propagators of fake news (“Trumped!”, Wednesday at 9 am), and what rules should be set for research in a code of conduct (Thursday, 2 pm). Interactive events like the game “To Gabon or not to Gabon” (Tuesday at 4 pm) are designed to encourage an open exchange of views.

Politically relevant: Developing international governance

For Mark Lawrence, there is an urgent need for internationally binding rules in this area: “At the IASS we are elaborating concepts for the governance of climate engineering and also advise political actors on how they can develop corresponding measures.” The question of how geoengineering is perceived in the political sphere is another major theme of CEC17. Janos Pasztor, Executive Director of the Carnegie Climate Geoengineering Governance Initiative (C2G2) and former climate advisor to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, is also playing an active role at the conference.

Like its predecessor held in 2014, this Climate Engineering Conference is organised by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Potsdam. The conference partners are the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) and the SRMGI and C2G2 initiatives. The CEC17 media partner is Der Tagespiegel.

The conference programme and press kit can be found at <http://www.ce-conference.org/>

Twitter hashtag #DiscussCEC

Statements of speakers at the press briefing on 10 October

Lili Fuhr, Heinrich Böll Foundation

“To limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C we must be prepared to follow radical emissions reduction pathways that go far beyond conventional economic thinking. They include a politically driven premature phase-out of fossil fuels, sustainable peasant agriculture, and absolute reductions in global resource and energy consumption through circular-economy and zero-waste approaches. Proven and locally adapted technologies that support these objectives already exist. We also need to act to restore our ecosystems, first and foremost our rainforests, moors and oceans. If we’re serious about engaging in a rigorous discussion of ecologically sustainable and socially just alternatives to confront the root causes of climate change, then there is no reason to believe that geoengineering is needed.”

David Keith, Harvard University

“Cutting emissions to zero is necessary to enable a stable climate. It’s possible to make very fast emissions cuts while preserving energy services for the wealthy and increasing access for the poor. However, even the immediate elimination of emissions does not eliminate climate risks; it simply stops the accumulation of carbon and thus the increase in climate impacts. In my view, solar geoengineering is – at best – a supplement to emissions cuts, not a substitute for them. It is possible that a combination of emissions cuts, carbon removal, and solar geoengineering could provide a significantly safer climate than emissions cuts alone or emissions cuts and carbon removal combined. Possible but unproven. The central political challenge is how to learn more about solar geoengineering – a potentially useful and potentially dangerous technology – given that research will likely be overhyped and exploited by forces opposed to emissions cuts.”

Pablo Suarez, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre

“The humanitarian sector is active at the global frontline of climate impacts. Geoengineering is a humanitarian concern: The potential for deliberate large-scale intervention in the Earth’s climate system has major implications in terms of impacts on the most vulnerable. Those who can suffer the worst outcomes need to be involved, especially given the plausibility of ‘predatory geoengineering’, where recklessly self-concerned actions may result in harmful consequences to others. It is imperative to link science, policy and humanitarian practice, creating a geoengineering risk-management framework to ensure that the interests of the most vulnerable are considered and addressed.”

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact

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The Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) conducts research with the goal of identifying, advancing, and guiding transformation processes towards sustainable societies in Germany and abroad. Its research practice is transdisciplinary, transformative, and co-creative. The institute cooperates with partners in academia, political institutions, administrations, civil society, and the business community to understand sustainability challenges and generate potential solutions. A strong network of national and international partners supports the work of the institute. Among its central research topics are the energy transition, emerging technologies, climate change, air quality, systemic risks, governance and participation, and cultures of transformation. The IASS is funded by the research ministries of the Federal Government of Germany and the State of Brandenburg.

Weitere Informationen:

- <http://www.ce-conference.org/>

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