

KIMO Resolution 2023/01

Phasing out black carbon

This resolution was agreed unanimously by members at the KIMO International AGM on 6 October 2023 and became KIMO policy on that date.

Black carbon is a short-lived climate pollutant with an impact that far exceeds that of carbon dioxide, contributing significantly to Arctic warming and warming in mid-latitudes. Arctic waters are becoming navigable for longer periods; between 2013 and 2019, the Arctic Council reports a 25% increase in shipping in the Arctic and a 75% increase in the distance sailed by all vessels. Black carbon rapidly accelerates melting if it lands on ice or snow, and is virtually impossible to clean up if spilled. Exposure to black carbon has been linked to heart and lung damage, posing a serious health risk to coastal populations, which will only increase as shipping activity expands.

It has been evident for around 30 years that reducing black carbon emissions is necessary. While there has been a lot of progress to ban land-based emissions, the same efforts have not been made at sea. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has already formally recognised that black carbon is the second largest source of ship climate warming, responsible for around 20% of shipping's climate impact (over 20 years), and has been considering measures for over a decade but has not yet banned black carbon emissions due to pressure from the shipping industry. It is working to develop guidelines on goal-based control measures to reduce the impact of black carbon emissions from international shipping in the Arctic, but progress is slow and there is no indication that these measures will be mandatory (without exemptions or waivers) nor sufficiently timely to prevent further avoidable warming in the Arctic.

Reducing emissions from the shipping industry could be achieved easily and quickly, and would have an immediate impact on the amount of black carbon being emitted. Many ships in the Arctic still run on heavy fuel oil, which generates black carbon. Most could easily switch to cleaner burning distillate fuels but do not because of the cost. Black carbon is short-lived so could rapidly disappear from the atmosphere if regulations were imposed.

KIMO believes it is imperative that the IMO accelerates the development and implementation of mandatory measures for all ships, existing and new, to reduce particulate matter and black carbon from shipping.

Recognizing the need for a clean environment in and around the Northern, Baltic and Arctic seas and the threat posed to marine ecosystems and coastal communities by release of black carbon from shipping, KIMO urges:

The International Maritime Organisation

1. To commit to preparing concrete proposals for approval in 2024, which deliver mandatory black carbon emissions reductions from all ships that impact the Arctic;
2. To amend MARPOL Annex VI by introducing a mandatory regulation requiring ships operating in and near Arctic waters to move to distillate or cleaner non-fossil fuels;
3. To adopt a more ambitious interim target to reduce shipping's climate impact by 50% by 2030;

European Commission and Member States

4. To ensure that black carbon is specifically included in the 2026 review of the Fit for 55 Fuel EU Maritime Regulation, thereby following up on the EU's commitments made in its 2021 Arctic Strategy.

KIMO members agree to submit this Resolution to all National Governments, the European Commission, the International Maritime Organisation and other relevant organisations.