

Climate change could release toxins trapped in ice

By Susanne Rust, Climate Watch

Despite a global decrease in the production of certain toxic chemicals, we may be in for an onslaught.

That's because rising global temperatures are causing the release of persistent organic pollutants, such as DDT and PCBs, which have been locked in arctic ice for more than half a century.

Although the chemicals were created to provide societal benefits, such as killing mosquitoes and protecting crops, it didn't take long for scientists to see they were having devastating effects on the environment.

Studies have shown many of these chemicals can cause cancer, birth defects and other health problems. And they don't just wash away. Persistent organic pollutants, as the class of chemicals is known, stick around for decades before finally breaking down.

They also are attracted to fatty tissue in animals and pass through the food chain from one animal to the next.

Recognizing the dangers of these chemicals, dozens of wealthy nations joined forces in 2001 to ban 12 of them by signing the Stockholm Convention on POPs (persistent organic pollutants). Yet since that ban, scientists had noticed localized upticks in atmospheric concentrations of these chemicals, especially over the Arctic.

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