

The *Times* has two interesting environmental stories today. Both are worth reading. They relate in different ways to climate change, but they're both interesting even if climate change isn't an issue that excites you.



Researching Methane Releases

The [first](#) and most important story is about melting of permafrost in the Arctic. Huge amounts of carbon are locked up in the permafrost. Current estimates are that carbon releases due to warming of the permafrost could equal 10-30% of current human CO₂ releases, depending on the extent of warming. But there are major uncertainties about these figures, about the pace of the releases, and about the extent to which the releases be CO₂ or methane (a much more potent greenhouse gas). The article also has a lot of useful information about how the carbon got to be there in the first place and about the release process.

One of the lessons of climate science is how interconnected the world is. Emissions in LA and Beijing help lead to warming, which causes melting in Canada and Siberia, releasing gases from ancient frozen grasses that in turn help change the climate in Brazil. It truly is a small world after all.



Modern Lighting Technology

The [second](#) story is about the effort of the House of Representatives to keep energy-wasting light bulbs on the market. An appropriations rider delays enforcement until October 1. It turns out, however, that the delay makes little difference. According to the *Times*, "the delay

hardly matters” because the “looming possibility of the new standards, signed into law by President Bush in 2007 — and the fact that places like Europe, Australia, Brazil and China have already put similar measures in place or intend to do so — has transformed the industry.”

The effort to make the U.S. a haven for an obsolete technology is very peculiar. Clinging to the past in this way seems at odds with America’s historic role as a technological innovator. In keeping with the California slogan that “the future starts here,” we have already made the transition here. I actually hadn’t noticed, and it turns out that’s fairly typical. “January 1 came and people were able to go out and buy light bulbs,” according to a spokesman for the California Energy Commission. “There was no light bulb apocalypse.”