

Experts seek global air pollution solution

Seattle, Washington, AFP

Though each country regulates its own air quality, the fact is that pollution knows no boundaries, and dirty air from Asia can easily hop the Pacific to pollute the western United States, experts say, in calling for a global pollution solution.

Jet stream-driven pollution from Asia can cross the ocean in a matter of days, with dramatic effect on the quality of air on the US West Coast, Daniel Jaffe, an environmental specialist at the University of Washington, told the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The starkest effects of this transpollution, he said, are an increase in the

levels of ozone and fine particulate matter, well over limits set by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Asian pollution can cross the Pacific on winds fed by a low pressure system over the Aleutian Islands off southwestern Alaska and a high pressure system near Hawaii in mid-Pacific, the combination of which propels Asian air masses to the US West Coast on what experts call "a high-speed conveyor belt".

"It's gone from a geophysical curiosity to a point where we can now say that, 'Yes, this occurs at large-enough levels occasionally that it can affect our air quality,'" said Mr Jaffe.

Nives Dolsak, from the University of Washington, said pollution generated in one country increasingly impinges

on neighbouring countries, but in some cases, countries thousands of miles away.

"There is no one magic solution to international environmental problems," she said. "I believe action needs to be taken at all of these levels."

Ms Nives pointed to a current collaboration among Japan, South Korea, the United States and Canada to monitor pollution levels in China to predict when harmful pollution can impact on other countries, and to alert them.

"Many of the same activities that produce global climate change also cause the pollution that's coming here," said Ms Nives. "At the federal level, we have decided not to get involved in global climate change policy, but the states and cities are doing a lot."