DIRTY SNOW HEATS ARCTIC

By Doug O'Harra

It’s an old Alaska gardening trick: scatter wood ash on the late-melting snow. The April-May sun will eat darkened stuff up, exposing the Earth and fertilizing the loam.

As any Far North resident knows well, dirty snow melts faster.

But what about the Arctic Ice and Far North climate, where the Earth has been warming many times faster than the rest of the globe?

A team of scientists from the University of California Irvine have confirmed what common sense predicts: the soot-stained polar ice and snow has become a major driver of Arctic warming, perhaps explaining up to one-third of the warming most studies blame on greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide.

“It’s like placing tiny toaster ovens on the snow pack,” said scientist Charlie Zender, in a UCI story about the study, the first to take into account forest fires and estimate the full impact of fall-out on warming.

Unlike much of the climate science that hinges on gig-busting supercomputer programs and rocket-science complexity, the relationship between warming and soot is as fundamental as road dirt.