Globally Significant CO₂ Emissions From Katla, a Subglacial Volcano in Iceland

Evgenia Ilyinskaya (1), Stephen Mobbs (2), Ralph Burton (2), Mike Burton (3), Federica Pardini (3), Melissa Anne Pfeffer (4), Ruth Purvis (5), James Lee (5), Stephane Baguette (6), Barbara Brooks (2), Ionna Colfescu (2), Gudrun Nina Petersen (4), Axel Wellpott (6), and Baldur Bergsson (4)


Volcanoes are a key natural source of CO₂, but global estimates of volcanic CO₂ flux are predominantly based on measurements from a fraction of world’s actively degassing volcanoes. We combine high-precision airborne measurements from 2016 and 2017 with atmospheric dispersion modeling to quantify CO₂ emissions from Katla, a major subglacial volcanic caldera in Iceland that last erupted 100 years ago but has been undergoing significant unrest in recent decades. Katla’s sustained CO₂ flux, 12–24 kt/d, is up to an order of magnitude greater than previous estimates of total CO₂ release from Iceland’s natural sources. Katla is one of the largest volcanic sources of CO₂ on the planet, contributing up to 4% of global emissions from nonerupting volcanoes. Further measurements on subglacial volcanoes worldwide are urgently required to establish if Katla is exceptional, or if there is a significant previously unrecognized contribution to global CO₂ emissions from natural sources.