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Anger at US climate retreat



AP

US wants to find other ways to address climate change

Governments and environmentalists around the world have reacted angrily to the announcement by President Bush's administration that it will not implement the Kyoto treaty on combating global warming.

The 1997 agreement was signed by the Clinton administration, European Union member states and Japan, but the White House says Mr Bush does not support it and is calling for a cabinet review of climate change policy.

The head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, Christie Whitman, had earlier said that other co-signatories would have to find a different approach to dealing with global warming.

The German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder will urge Mr Bush to rethink when the two men meet in Washington on Thursday.

“
George Bush is attempting to tear up the Kyoto protocol in the face of world opinion
 ”
Friends of the Earth

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The BBC's Stephen Sackur in Washington

"Power or the lack of it lies at the heart of this policy shift"
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Frank Maisano, Global Climate Coalition

"With Kyoto in place there was more than a disagreement between the US and the EU"
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Philip Clapp, of the National

Environmental Trust

"It looks as if global warming is going to be a Bush family legacy"

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Margaret Wallstrom, EU Environment Minister

"The USA have the biggest problems and highest costs to remedy what has already been done"

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Former Environment Minister, John Gummer

"We must not give way just because America tells us what to do"

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German officials say Mr Schroeder will ask Mr Bush to take responsibility for America's record of producing 25% of the gases that some scientists say are producing global warming.

The Swedish Government, which currently holds the European Union presidency, described the move as appalling and provocative, while the environmental group Friends of the Earth said it threatened "climate disaster".

Sweden's Environment Minister, Kjell Larssen, told the BBC that the new US administration seemed to be preparing to withdraw from the global community's effort to deal with a major threat to the future of the world.

The UK has described Mr Bush's decision as exceptionally serious.

"There is no serious possibility of negotiating an acceptable alternative," said British Environment Minister Michael Meacher.

Japan has said it will redouble its efforts to persuade the Bush administration to change its mind. Australia warned the treaty was dead without US support.

A report in the Washington Post newspaper quoted an official source as saying the White House had asked the State Department to establish how the US could legally withdraw its signature to the accord.

Unequivocal

Ari Fleischer, the White House spokesman, said: "The president has been unequivocal. He does not support the Kyoto treaty."



Third world emissions are rising fast

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Mr Fleischer made it clear that Mr Bush would not now submit the treaty for ratification by the US Senate.

So far, no major European nation has ratified the treaty either, but EU states believe it is the best framework for tackling climate change.



Mr Fleischer said that, as the treaty had not taken effect, "there was nothing to withdraw from".

Christie Whitman: Different approach needed

The BBC Washington correspondent says Mr Bush thinks the measures required by the treaty put too heavy a burden on the US economy.

However, Ms Whitman said the US would remain "engaged" with the issue.

The Kyoto Protocol commits 38 industrialised nations to cut their emissions of the main gases produced by human activities, which are blamed for climate change.

By 2012, they would have to cut emissions by an average of 5.2% on their 1990 levels, and the US by 7%.

The US is responsible for about 25% of global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main pollutant covered by Kyoto.

US objections

It argues that this is not unreasonable, as it produces more wealth than any other country.

The US objects to the protocol on the grounds that it concentrates on emissions from industrialised countries, and refuses at this stage to seek to limit pollution from developing nations.

The emissions of rapidly developing countries like India and China will soon be set to match its own, it says.

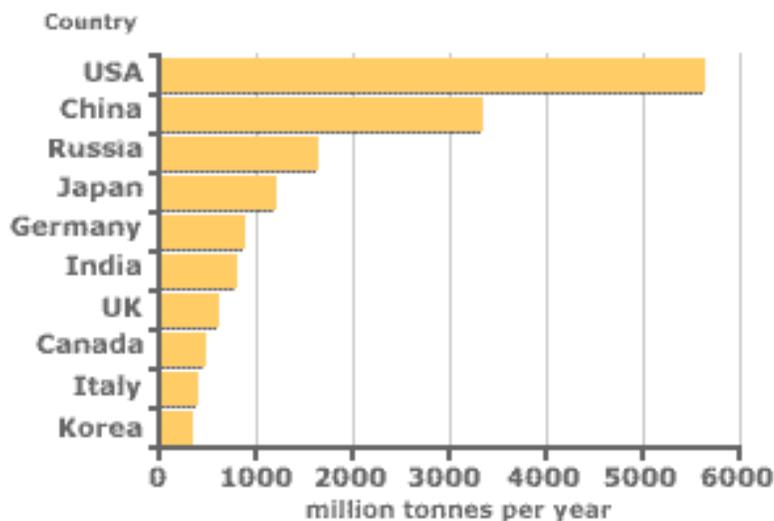
Mr Fleischer said: "The administration is committed to working with our friends and allies on a plan that includes developing nations as well as developed nations."

The apparent collapse of the Kyoto treaty was welcomed by the Global Climate Coalition, a US industrial group that campaigns on the environment issue.

Frank Maisano, the coalition's media spokesman, told the BBC that current scientific research undermined the treaty. He said many researchers acknowledged that we still had much to learn about the way the climate worked and to drive through big economic changes based on current uncertainties was not justified.

"The scientists are saying this is a complex issue with a lot of difficulty with the things we do and don't understand," he said. "To throw a couple of things into a computer model, which at best only does what it is told to do, and come up with a worst-case scenario and say 'this is going to happen' - that's bordering on dishonest."

Emissions of CO₂ (1996)



Source US Environmental protection agency

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