

Global Climate Policy

As was seen earlier in Table 9.1, the rich countries are producing over half of the CO₂ and considerably more CO₂ per capita. The poor countries think that the rich countries have benefited from cheap fossil fuels and have largely caused the problem. Thus, the rich should solve the problem. The rich countries, while conceding that they have caused the bulk of the problem, note that as poor countries with high population growth continue to grow and develop, their CO₂ will soon surpass that of the developed countries. As would be expected, each side on the debate wants the other side to pay more. Taking action against global warming will clearly require global cooperation.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was formed in the 1980s by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program. They published comprehensive reports in 1990 and 1999 outlining the scientific evidence on climate change. The first attempt at global agreement on climate change was signed at the Earth Summit meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The agreement called the UN Framework Convention on Climate was originally signed by 165 nations to become effective in March of 1994.

This voluntary agreement recognizes global warming as a potential problem. It sets a goal of stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels that do not threaten the climate or the food supply but that allow for sustainable development. It has provisions for information sharing, requires greenhouse gas emission and sink inventories (carbon absorbing activities or entities such as forests) along with mitigation programs for each signing country. It set the stage for further amendments and protocols for more concrete proposals and commitments. It called for education about climate change and for CO₂ equivalent emissions in industrial countries to fall back to 1990 levels by the year 2000. (UNEP's Information Unit for Conventions (IUC), revised in January 1997. Châtelaine, Switzerland <http://www.unep.ch/iuc/submenu/begin/beginner.htm>). Text of this agreement can be found at <http://www.tufts.edu/departments/fletcher/multi/texts/BH1006.txt>.

Despite the agreement, carbon dioxide emissions continued to increase globally between 1990 and 1996 as can be seen in the above table. There was a small net reduction in Western Europe, largely from the decrease of poor quality coal and low industrial output in the former East Germany. The transitional economies in Eastern Europe show larger reductions in CO₂ from weak economic performance and the switch to cleaner fuels. The former USSR showed even larger decreases in carbon emissions largely from poor economic performance.

The parties to the Rio convention have met subsequently in meetings called Conferences of the Parties (COP) to determine how to achieve the objectives of the original agreement. So far there are been seven such conferences with an eighth scheduled for the fall of 2002 in Delhi. The location and some of the results of these conferences are as follows.

COP1 – Berlin, 1995. Countries agreed to continue international cooperation relating to the greenhouse effect, started to work on a protocol or set of rules and procedures to govern the global climate agreement but were unable to agree on specific implementation policies.

COP2 – Geneva, 1996. Countries agreed to speed up talks on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Earth Summit II - New York, 1997. There was evaluation of the greenhouse gas reductions since Earth Summit I.

COP3 – Kyoto, 1997. This is the most noteworthy of the COP meetings. It was attended by around 160 countries and produced the Kyoto Protocol. This protocol called for mandatory controls on CO₂ for the 38 Annex I countries, which include the OECD countries (less Mexico) and the transitional economies. It requires the U.S. to reduce CO₂ equivalent emissions 7% below 1990 levels by 2012, the European Community to reduce 8% below 1990 levels, and the Russian Federation to be at 1990 levels by 2012. Some countries such as Norway, Iceland, and Australia are allowed increases, but these increases are less than they would be under no agreement. It allows for voluntary trading of pollution permits to satisfy a country's commitment. This protocol had been signed by 84 countries and ratified by 54 as of May 6, 2002. (<http://www.unfccc.de/resource/kpstats.pdf>) The agreement will be in force 90 days after being ratified by 55 countries or parties representing 55% of CO₂.

COP4 - Buenos Aires, 1998. This meeting, attended by 180 countries, adopted a 2-year action plan of action to move greenhouse gas reductions forward. During this meeting more details were ironed out on timetables for CO₂ reductions, developing rules on emissions trading and technology transfers. Kazakhstan and Argentina volunteered to be Annex I countries and limit emissions. Several companies also announced their intention to limit greenhouse gas emissions. During this meeting the U.S. signed the Kyoto Protocol, but it still has to go to the U.S. Senate for ratification where fossil fuel lobbies will try to defeat its ratification. It is expected that the coal industry will be particularly hard hit because coal is the fossil fuel that emits the largest amount of carbon per energy produced. Since the U.S. has more energy in coal reserves than OPEC has in oil reserves, a coal phase out would be expensive for the U.S. For these reasons, the U.S. has been dragging its feet. Clinton refused to send the treaty to a republican Senate for ratification unless limits were extended to the major developing countries, while most developing countries are highly opposed to such limits for themselves. (<http://www.igc.apc.org/nrdc/brie/global>) (<http://www.nrdc.org/status/gwbuen.html#dispatches>) The official web site with full text for this agreement is (www.cop4.org.)

COP5 – Bonn, 1999. Countries made progress on accelerating the negotiation process; Kyoto mechanisms; land-use, land use change and forestry; and compliance.

COP6 - The Hague, 2000. Countries could come to no agreement on rules to implement the Kyoto protocol and negotiations were suspended. Contentious issues were emissions trading and credits for carbon sinks. COP6 resumed in Bonn in 2001 and set up rules for financial and technological assistance to developing countries. The United States did not attend these talks and looks unlikely to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. President Bush in March of 2001 declared his opposition to the treaty. There was some agreement from the attending industrialized nations on emission trading and measurement of carbon sinks.

COP7 - Marrakesh, 2001. Countries put together a rule book for implementing the Kyoto Protocol. The U.S. and Australia, both heavy coal users, are no longer

committed to the Protocol, while the EU is moving towards emission trading in greenhouse gases. Companies will initially be given permits, if they need more, they will have to buy them.

COP8 (scheduled for) New Delhi, 2002.