

# Global Warming and the Kyoto Protocol

## Introduction

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Global warming is one of the greatest challenges the world faces today. An international panel of 2,000 leading scientists predicts that the average worldwide temperature will rise 2 to 10 degrees this century. This change is being caused by the way we use energy, which is creating too much carbon dioxide and other gases that thicken the earth's insulating layer in the atmosphere. However, this climate change is not simply about temperature. If left unchecked, it will also bring about unpredictable weather patterns and create increasingly extreme weather conditions such as blizzards, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, and droughts. As devastating as this will be for modern countries, it will be even more so for the third world which is already drastically unprepared to deal with these situations, as in the example of Haiti where nearly 3,000 people died during Hurricane Jeanne. Because global warming is a global problem that can't be solved by one country alone, the United States must work with other countries to control it. The United States should re-engage in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process and participate in the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol is the world's first step in addressing global warming.

## Basic Facts

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- The Kyoto Protocol is a treaty created on December 11, 1997, by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It requires industrialized nations to reduce their levels of greenhouse gases according to specific amounts and schedules.
- Kyoto obliges rich nations to cut overall emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide by 5.2 percent below 1990 levels by 2008-12 by curbing use of coal, oil and natural gas and shifting to cleaner energies like solar or wind power.
- The Protocol will allow for "emission trading," or the buying and selling of emission credits on the international market in order to provide flexibility and cost efficiency.
- Developing countries will be expected to meet certain restrictions as well, but at a reduced level. In order to facilitate their industrial and environmental growth, developed countries will have the option of trading through the "Clean Development Mechanism." This is a system that would allow for developed countries to help promote emission reduction projects in developing countries in exchange for emission credits.
- Of the 36 industrialized countries participating in the treaty, only the U.S. and Australia have yet to ratify it.
- The U.S. alone is responsible for the emission of over one fifth of the world's greenhouse gasses.

# FACT SHEET

## Talking Points

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- Global warming is a solvable problem. By making wise energy choices at home while working with our friends abroad to reduce emissions around the world, the U.S. can build a safer future for our children.
- If unchecked, global warming could cause increases in flooding and droughts contributing to crop failures and subsequent famines. Changes in regional temperatures will interfere with crop cycles, making it more difficult for farmers to predict growing seasons. Coastal areas around the world, including in the United States, could face severe flooding.
- The Kyoto Protocol is an important step towards achieving the Convention's ultimate goal of stabilizing greenhouse gases at a level that would not interfere with the climate system.
- Since it is one of the world's largest polluters, the U.S. is setting a poor example for the international community in its stated resolve to help the global environment by reducing emissions.
- It is a possibility that countries participating in Kyoto, such as the majority of Europe, may punish the U.S. with tariffs since it will not be sharing the cost of pollution reduction.

## U.S. Position

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The U.S signed on to the Treaty in 1998 under the Clinton administration but the Senate did not ratify it. The Bush administration has since opposed ratification stating that it puts unrealistic cutbacks on gas emissions and will ultimately hinder economic growth. According to the New York Times, Vice President Dick Cheney is pursuing proposals to abandon the Kyoto Treaty entirely.