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Canada leads pollution laggards

Emissions up, not down to Kyoto levels

But protocol will work, activists insist

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REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina—The Kyoto Protocol to cut greenhouse gases goes into effect two months from yesterday and industrialized countries like Canada and Japan find themselves with emissions embarrassingly beyond their agreed-upon targets for 2012.

Canada leads the laggards with emissions growth at 20 per cent from 1990 although it has committed to a 6 per cent reduction by 2012.

Japan's emissions are up 12 per cent and it has to cut them also by six, while New Zealand must show zero growth and is currently up 21 per cent.

The European Union as a whole is doing better, with a 2.9 per cent fall toward a 2012 target of minus 8 per cent. But there are problems. Italy, for example, is 8 per cent higher and must go 8 per cent lower.

The U.N.-backed Kyoto deal aims to reduce the six major heat-trapping gases, including carbon dioxide, by 5 per cent, a first small step in the fight against global warming.

Scientists say a sustained increase in temperature change has disrupted the global climate — and is likely to continue doing so — increasing the intensity of storms, potentially drying up farmlands and raising ocean levels, among other things.

Russia's decision in September to ratify Kyoto, allowing the treaty to go into force with a seven-year delay, might have caught countries by surprise as they expected a more protracted battle.

But negotiators and activists on the sidelines of this week's U.N. conference on climate change — the first with Kyoto ready to go — say Kyoto's compliance rules are going to work.

Penalties for non-compliance are not monetary, but rather are deeper emissions reductions after 2012.

"You have to deliver your cuts at some time," said Stephan Singer, who tracks European policy for environmental group WWF. "But, of course, there is no green army coming in and forcing you to do it ... that's the U.N. in the end."

The EU, the driving force behind the fight against global warming, will benefit from its emissions trading system that goes into effect on Jan. 1. Nations and industries that pollute less can sell carbon credits to those that pollute more.

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EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said he had no doubt "the EU will be able to meet its Kyoto targets, provided we sustain our efforts."

But Canada cannot say the same. "Is it absolutely certain we will get to Kyoto? No, it is not absolutely certain," Alex Manson, director of Canada's Climate Change Bureau, told Reuters.

He said Canada picked up the pace against emissions in 2003, but it has been hurt by the fact that its biggest trading partner — the United States — withdrew from Kyoto in 2001. U.S. emissions are up 12 per cent since 1990.

"It does affect some of the measures you can take in some sectors. It didn't make our problem any easier," Manson said.

Scientists believe global warming is at least partially to blame for weather disturbances experienced this year.

The year 2004 was the fourth hottest on record, extending a trend since 1990 that has registered the 10 warmest years, a U.N. weather agency said this week.

During the summer, heat waves in southern Europe pushed temperatures to near-record highs in southern Spain, Portugal and Romania, where thermostats peaked at 40C while the rest of Europe sweltered through above-average temperatures.

The extreme weather of 2004 extended to storms. The Caribbean had four hurricanes that reached Category 4 or 5 status — those capable of causing extreme and catastrophic damage. It was only the fourth time in recent history that so many were recorded.

The hurricanes of 2004 caused more than \$53 billion in damage in the Caribbean and the United States.

The worst damage was on Haiti, where as many as 1,900 people died from flooding and mudslides caused by Tropical Storm Jeanne in September.

Japan registered a record number of typhoons making landfall this year with 10, while back-to-back storms in the Philippines killed at least 740 people in the wettest year for the globe since 2000, the U.N. agency said.

Other parts of the world also witnessed extreme weather, with droughts occurring in the western United States, parts of Africa, Afghanistan, Australia and India. The U.N. weather agency said the droughts were part of what appears to be a surge over the last decade.

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