

Environmental Movement

You represent millions of people around the world who are committed to protecting the global environment—our air, water, soil, plants, animals, ecosystems, and climate. The environmental movement is motivated and united by these beliefs:

- we must protect the environment for ourselves and for future generations;
- the world’s plants and animals have as much right to exist as humans do;
- people in the world’s richest countries (including the U.S.) must reduce their consumption and waste; and
- people in developing nations (including China) must find more environmentally sustainable ways to industrialize and raise their standard of living, so that they do not repeat the mistakes of the U.S. and other rich countries.

The environmental movement is deeply concerned about the growing problem of climate change. The climate—the air, its temperature, the winds, clouds, and weather—is the most complex system in the global environment. Over the past 200 years, humans have begun to disrupt one of the most basic parts of that system: the way that the air is heated and cooled by the “greenhouse effect.” By burning more and more coal, oil, and natural gas for fuel, we have begun to change the climate.

The impact of climate change on this generation may be small, but we have a responsibility to our grandchildren to begin solving the problem that we created. Do we want them to inherit a world where storms, floods, and droughts make life even more miserable for many of the world’s poorest people? Where even the rich cannot escape the misery of burning heat waves and rising seas that wash away thousands of miles of coastal land each year?

We have the power to protect the global climate and reduce the risks that we pass on to future generations. We need the political will to act.



Your goals

So far, the governments of the world have done almost nothing to begin reducing their greenhouse-gas emissions. They've signed agreements, but those agreements don't amount to much unless governments, businesses, and individuals take action. To move governments and business toward real action, your goals are:



1. Get the U.S. and China to make real progress on climate change, by increasing energy efficiency, switching to renewable fuels, and planting trees to capture carbon.
2. Get the U.S. and China to commit to real limits on their carbon emissions. The U.S. emitted about 1.53 billion tons of carbon in 2000. By 2015, the U.S. should reduce its emissions to no more than 1.4 billion tons. China should agree to slow down the growth in its emissions to reach the same target, 1.4 billion tons in 2015.
3. Get the international business community to make carbon commitments and investments in energy-efficient technologies and carbon-free energy (solar, wind, and hydroelectric power).
4. Get governments and business to agree not to expand the use of nuclear power.



Why the U.S., China, and the business community must take the lead

Because all countries and all people share the climate, and all are hurting the climate to some degree by burning fossil fuels, all countries have a responsibility to deal with this problem. However, the United States is releasing far more carbon into the atmosphere than any other country. The U.S. has about 5 percent of the world's people, but it's responsible for 25 percent of the world's total carbon emissions. That means the U.S. also emits more carbon per person than almost any other country.

The underlying problem is that American businesses and consumers are behaving in irresponsible ways. A large percentage of all new cars sold in the last decade have been sport utility vehicles (SUVs). These gas-guzzling monsters are among the most energy-inefficient cars ever built, but they are very profitable for automobile manufacturers. Americans are also using more electric power each year for air conditioning, heating, and home electronics. That wouldn't be a problem if the sources of energy for electricity were carbon-free (solar, wind, or hydroelectric), but most electric power in the U.S. continues to come from coal-fired power plants. The U.S. government simply must get businesses and consumers to become more energy-efficient and use lower-carbon fuels.

China must also change the path that it is on. China produces and uses more coal for electric power and for home and factory boilers than any other country. Coal accounts for roughly two-thirds of China's fossil-fuel consumption, and air pollution from burning coal has become a big problem. Coal-burning is also the biggest source of China's carbon emissions. Because coal is such a big source of carbon, China is the world's second-largest carbon emitter. China emitted roughly 760 million tons of carbon in 2000. If its government doesn't take strong action soon, China will more than double its carbon emissions by 2015, to 1.8 billion tons. At that point, China will probably be the leading contributor to climate change, emitting more carbon than the U.S.

The world's large corporations (the organizations that the international business representative speaks for) have played a major role in creating the problem of climate change, and they must also help solve it. They produce the coal, oil, and gas. They build the power plants, automobiles, home boilers, office buildings, and homes that use the fuel. They profit from all of these activities, but many of them don't want to pay the cost to make our fuels, transportation, homes, and offices more climate-friendly.

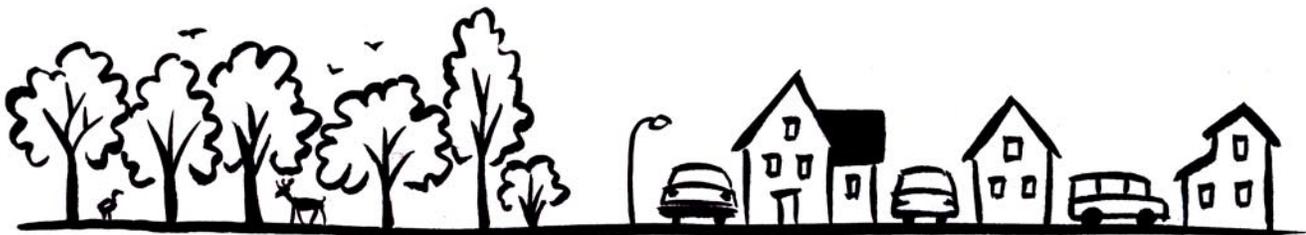
What the U.S., China, and the business community need to do

There are three main ways to reduce carbon emissions: increasing energy efficiency, switching to non-carbon fuels, and taking carbon out of the atmosphere. The U.S., China, and the business community need to take action on all three. In addition, to ensure that they make progress in all three areas, you want them to agree to limit carbon emissions significantly by 2015.

Increase energy efficiency

There are many ways that the U.S., China, and the business community can increase energy efficiency. The most important action that the governments of the U.S. and China can take is to increase standards for energy efficiency. Both countries already have some standards covering energy use in some of these areas: automobiles (miles per gallon), buildings (insulation and heating and cooling systems), and appliances (energy use per hour for TVs, computers, and refrigerators). But many of the standards are set too low, and many are voluntary, meaning that business does not have to meet them. By increasing existing standards and forcing business to meet them, the U.S. and China can take dramatic steps to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions while also saving energy, reducing local air pollution, and encouraging businesses to develop new technologies. As the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, the U.S. and China can have a truly powerful impact on the global environment if they work together.

For example, the U.S. should increase its fuel-efficiency standard for SUVs from 20.7 miles per gallon to 27 miles per gallon immediately, and raise it to 36 miles per gallon over the next five years. There is technology already available that automobile manufacturers could use to meet this goal at low cost. People who buy higher-mileage SUVs would actually save money by spending less money on gasoline over the period of time they own the car! Since the U.S. drives the design of automobiles around the world, the same automobiles would soon be sold in China, helping it reduce its emissions.



Switch to non-carbon fuels

Both the U.S. and China have great potential to increase the use of fuels that do not produce carbon. These fuels include renewable sources: wind, solar, hydroelectric, and geothermal. In both countries, what is needed are laws requiring that power companies produce more and more electricity using renewable energy. Nuclear energy also produces no carbon, but it is so dangerous to people and the environment in other ways that we strongly oppose any increase in nuclear power as a response to climate change.

In the U.S., there is currently no national law requiring power companies to use renewable energy, although there are some state laws that do. The U.S. has enormous renewable-energy resources that could be developed if the national government required business to do so. In China, renewables currently supply less than 1 percent of all electricity. The government's current commitment is to produce 2 percent of all electricity with renewable fuels by 2015.

You want both countries to commit to producing at least 10 percent of all electricity using renewable energy by 2015. Whatever the business community says, there is a lot of evidence that it is possible to increase the use of renewable energy quickly without increasing the price of energy.

Capture carbon through reforestation

The U.S. and China both have large amounts of land that could be planted with trees to capture carbon from the atmosphere. Although both countries have good forestry programs, both can and should do more to require timber businesses and landowners to plant trees. A recent international study found that planting trees in developing countries like China could be one of the least expensive ways to reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere.

Commit to emissions targets for 2015

Because there are so many opportunities for carbon reductions through energy efficiency, renewable fuels, and tree planting, the U.S. and China should have no problem making national commitments to reduce their carbon emissions. If the U.S. does nothing more than it is already doing to reduce carbon emissions, its emissions will probably grow from 1.53 billion tons to nearly 1.8 billion tons in 2015. If China does nothing more, its emissions will probably grow from 760 million tons to 1.8 billion tons by 2015.

You want both countries to commit to emissions targets of 1.4 billion tons in 2015. This would mean a 10 percent reduction from 2000 emissions for the U.S. This target would still allow China's emissions to nearly double, but it would still be less than the 1.8 billion tons that China will likely emit if it doesn't make a commitment. You think this target is fair and reasonable for both countries. The U.S. can afford to make the investments to start reducing its emissions. China must make major investments in manufacturing and energy production anyway, so all it needs to do is set standards that require those investments to be climate-friendly.

