



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE: Topic 1

COVID-19 RELATED CHANGES IN FOSSIL FUEL USE IN THE EFFORT TO STYMIE CLIMATE CHANGE

Background:

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an enormous decrease in fossil fuel use due to the lack of transportation and movement. This provided a perfect opportunity to decarbonize the world. Leaders from all over, met in 2015 signed the Paris Agreement, a treaty that would require all countries to prevent the earth's temperature from rising more than 1.5 Celsius. Iran, Turkey, Eritrea, Iraq, South Sudan, Libya and Yemen were the only ones who did not join. When Donald Trump was elected, the US left the agreement and joined back when Joe Biden took his place in 2021. Currently, almost none of the countries are following the regulations that were decided in the treaty. Researchers have concluded that the drastic drop-in economic activity due to enforced confinement meant less energy was used that resulted in a daily global reduce in carbon dioxide emissions also.¹ The mean level, according to emissions data for six different economic sectors, from 2019 to April of 2020, declined by 17% in 69 countries.

Current Situation:

The burning of fossil fuels results in carbon dioxide being released in the atmosphere. When high levels of greenhouse gases are in the air, it causes an enhanced greenhouse effect or enhanced global warming that traps heat in our atmosphere which causes temperatures to rise. Experts suggest that 45% emissions need to be cut in the next 10 years for the countries to stay under the requirements of the agreement. China pledged to peak its emissions by 2030, Brazil pledged to reduce by 43% of their emissions by 2030, the EU pledged to reduce 55% of their emissions, the USA still has to make a commitment because they rejoined recently. The global oil industry is experiencing a shock like no other in its history². It must be noted that this was the case when the pandemic initially started affecting the market and the aim is to maintain the changes imposed by the global pandemic. A very major issue is how we can ensure that we put the world back on track without going back to our pre-COVID situation which, according to climate activists, was a threat. If countries do not take action, this would lead to 240 % more coal, 57% more oil and 71 % more gas production by 2030 than what would be necessary to reach the goals set.³ Many fossil fuel companies have bought renewable energy companies to balance out their emissions, however, many try to do this to cover up and continue to profit out of the fossil fuel industry. They have spent millions on clean energy campaigns whilst continuing or even increasing productions of gas and oil.⁴ The result is species extinction, food scarcity, health being compromised, lack of biodiversity, rise of sea levels and an increase in poverty caused by factors such as increase in the number of natural disasters.⁵ Protocol, promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5 % by 2020 compared to the ones in 2000.

¹ <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-leads-to-profound-cutbacks-in-fossil-fuel-use/>

² <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-leads-to-profound-cutbacks-in-fossil-fuel-use/>

³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103472>

⁴ <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>

⁵ <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>



Important bloc positions:

Australia:

Promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5% by 2020 compared to 2000 levels, though the current government is reconsidering.

Brazil:

Wants to cut emissions to the ones they had in 1994 and reduce deforestation from levels of 2020.

Canada:

Initially wanted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 6 % compared to 1990 numbers. Later on, it implemented a more realistic goal to reduce greenhouse emissions by 17% compared to 2005 levels by 2020, similarly to the US.

China:

No pledges made to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. This is a problem because the more time passes, the more the emissions will increase. However, they become more energy efficient.

European Union:

Promised to decrease fossil fuel emissions by 20% under the typical emissions of 1990 by 2020. They would increase this number by 10% if other countries promised similar goals.

India:

Has not promised reducing carbon emissions due to the fact that this industry helps reduce poverty but will increase energy efficiency by 20% per cent.

Russia:

Will reduce emissions by 15 % compared to 1990. It must be noted that this period was during the Soviet Union meaning emissions were very high.

US:

Wanted to reduce emissions by 17 % by 2020 but was dependent on the Congress passing an aggressive cap-and-trade bill. Now, that the last one has not happened, the US has not presented a plan to show how they will reach the goals they want to achieve.

COP 26:

The highest number of delegates was from the fossil fuel industry rather than each country, over 500 people. In this meeting, countries discussed their promises and pledges. Campaigners wanted to ban these individuals to arrive to unbiased conclusions to make a change. It must be noted that over 40 countries committed to shift away ⁶

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-59199484>



Possible solutions:

- Introducing, investing and relying more on renewable sources of energies. Wind, solar, geothermal and tidal powers could be funded and increased in number depending on a committee that will assess the location and implement the right non-renewable source to ensure the highest energy production levels.
- Incentives to put solar panels could be introduced. Even though they are expensive, the UN could provide subsidies for any LEDC's who would typically use mostly renewables.
- Sustainable transport by reducing prices on changing to electric vehicles. Reducing plane travel will bring many benefits like diminishing air pollution.
- Put pressure on fossil fuel companies by increasing taxes and implement policies that ensure banks, insurance companies and asset managers sponsor these companies less and less.
- Carbon taxes and carbon border taxes that consist in setting prices that a country needs to pay for each amount of greenhouse gases they emit. This will push countries to find new ways of producing energy with new technologies or switching fuels they use so that they can avoid paying more taxes.
- Emission trading will give flexibility for the usage of environmentally friendly sources of energy at lower, more affordable costs so that more companies can still profit and improve their carbon emissions.
- Non-proliferation treaty on coal power stations so that no new source of non-renewable energy are built.

Further reading:

- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103472>
- <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/governments-fossil-fuel-production-plans-dangerously-out-sync-paris>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-58982445>

Bibliography:

- <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-leads-to-profound-cutbacks-in-fossil-fuel-use/>
- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103472>
- <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>
- <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>
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