



WORLD CLIMATE CHANGE REPORT



December 15, 2009

www.bna.com

Reproduced with permission from World Climate Change Report, 2009 WCCR, 12/15/2009. Copyright © 2009 by The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. (800-372-1033) <http://www.bna.com>

In Copenhagen

ANDERSON'S NOTEBOOK: Fast Action and Fast Start in a Slow Copenhagen Process

COPENHAGEN—On Monday, negotiators continued to struggle toward agreement on the three top issues: (1) the promises heads of state may make to reduce carbon dioxide emissions (what percent, and by when?), (2) how much the developed world will pony up to stimulate a “fast start” for emissions reductions by developing nations, and (3) contentious differences over international reporting and verification.

The greatest progress appeared to have been made on “fast start” funding with about fifty nations meeting off-site on Sunday to consider alternatives. For example, a Mexican-Norwegian “Green Fund” would commence with \$10 billion a year in 2013 and climb to \$30-40 billion by 2020. But then Monday afternoon, Dec. 14, a group of developing countries led by African nations suspended the plenary by walking out—to raise the stakes?

The other issues, though, appear to be more or less on track, but almost certainly headed to a global accord for lower, slower, unverified carbon dioxide emissions reductions than hoped. Arrivals begin today for scores of heads of state, which may help clarify the picture.

For island states threatened with extinction, though, the worry is that whatever Copenhagen produces, whatever occurs next year to give it teeth, time will run out before they are literally washed away. For them and other countries vulnerable to devastating climate change and loss of species and entire ecosystems, the search is on for some type of faster action to delay devastation and buy time.

Such a strategy, the Fast Action Agenda, is making a showing here in Copenhagen. Durwood Zaelke, an NGO campaigner working with the island states, Europeans, and other nations such as Argentina, told me yesterday that that “fast action can buy us as much as a

decade of delay against the worst impacts of climate change, time for changes in the energy, transportation, and other slow-to-change, capital-intensive sectors.”

Large Effect of Non-Carbon Emissions. The scientific and the political case for the Fast Action Agenda is pretty compelling. Non-CO₂ related greenhouse effects may account for as much as 40 percent to 50 percent of man-made climate-forcing impacts. Interestingly, these effects may be easier to control in the short run, buying time for the slower, CO₂-oriented strategies of Copenhagen to work. And the gains could be very impressive.

Take hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), for example. The savings could be 100 -170 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) over the period 2013 to 2050. This is because many HFCs have extremely high global warming potentials (GWPs) compared to carbon dioxide. Some of them, especially the huge quantities of refrigerants in auto and commercial and home air conditioning, can be substituted down the GWP scale or destroyed under the Montreal Protocol, the “stealth” climate protocol whose record of actual achievement in reducing greenhouse gas emissions effects already rivals Kyoto. Its actual reductions in global warming potential dwarf the entire Kyoto Protocol achievement for the first commitment period (2008-2012).

Consider also black carbon, or soot—another 92 billion tons of CO₂e emissions could be avoided over the next fifty years. When deposited on snowfields or glaciers, light-absorbing black particles cause rapid melting. Black carbon has major urban industrial sources—including bunker oil burned by polar-region tankers—as well as rural developing-nation sources. By far the most important are the latter. Black carbon emissions from “biofueled” cook fires among the poorest populations, slash-and burn forestry, and agricultural burning, if curtailed, can yield immediate reductions in climate-forcing.

But the greatest returns are for immediate reductions of high-GWP HFC uses. Compare, for example, the one billion tons of CO₂e that controls on bunker oils and other lower-carbon boilers for maritime shipping might

achieve (a popular initiative in Copenhagen), and the 4 to 8 billion metric tons of CO₂e reductions possible by merely replacing over the next four to seven years the current mobile air-conditioning refrigerant (GWP: 1,440) with a less potent, less energy intensive one, HFC-1234yf (GWP: 4).

These are large numbers. But what is the total Fast Action Agenda proponents say could be achieved? Well over a hundred billion tons of CO₂e reductions and the equivalent of a “stay” of climate forcing are equal to almost a decade’s worth of carbon dioxide emissions.

Fast Action Component to Agreement? The political case being made here in Copenhagen for the Fast Action Agenda advocates that the United States and other major powers can gain significant support from the G-77 developing nations by insisting on a fast-action component in the final agreement.

Some “fast start” funding, for example, could be earmarked for efficient cook stoves for use in the poorest nations and for transition from bunker oil for shipping in polar lanes. Forging an explicit link between the new agreement (whatever it may finally be) and the Montreal Protocol’s highly effective process would greatly facilitate the Fast Action Agenda and push forward the HFC reductions that offer huge short-term gains.

As of today, the United States’s official position is that it remains opposed to cross-utilizing the climate and Montreal processes. But there is time for this position to change. Buying time for the UNFCCC process and for action in Congress seems like a win-win prospect. Specific earmarks in funding for G-77 fast action

seem entirely appropriate, but perhaps equally important would be a clause explicitly endorsing a two-protocol global climate strategy.

The Montreal Protocol already has achieved impressive greenhouse gas reductions. It successfully sets mandatory targets and timetables for developed and developing nations alike, targets and timetables that are, to coin a phrase, “measurable, reportable, and verifiable.”

Perhaps, once again, California could point the way.

Mary Nichols, the Chair of the California Air Resources Board, and a member of the COP delegation to which I also belong, told me today that “in California, we have focused on the shorter-lived, high GWP gases as early action measures. . . , including binding leak detection, capture, or recycling of refrigerants and industrial solvents. They can capture reductions real quickly and provide hope for slowing the loss of glaciers and risk to the polar bear.”

By FREDERICK R. ANDERSON

Frederick R. Anderson is a partner in the Washington office of McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP. He is attending the Copenhagen conference as a member of the California Action Reserve delegation that includes U.S. private sector and government officials. He advises companies on climate and energy matters and was on the National Academy of Science’s Board on Atmospheric Sciences and Climate. He also chairs the boards of two international environmental NGOs.