

EU remains off track to meet Kyoto targets

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Greenhouse gas emissions from the oldest European Union member states have declined slightly, according to the latest EU data.

However, the decline occurred to such a small degree, according to data released on Wednesday (18 June) from the European Environment Agency, that if they continue at this pace, they will overshoot reduction targets set under the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

The EEA figures show that the older member states - the EU-15 - reduced their emissions by 0.8 percent between 2005 and 2006 – bringing the total reduction to reached 2.7 percent below 1990 levels.

The emissions of the European Union as a whole, including new member states, decreased slightly in 2006. They were 0.3 percent lower than 2005, reaching a total reduction of 7.7 percent on 1990 levels.

The agency, which advises the EU on environmental issues, issued emissions figures for 2006 as the data is always published with a delay of about two years.

At the Kyoto summit, the EU-15 committed themselves to a joint Kyoto target of at least eight per cent below 1990 levels by 2012.

But, warn environmentalists, if the countries were to reduce emissions more or less equally every year, a linear path drawn from 1990 to 2012 would show that by this point, emissions should have already been reduced to 6.4 percent below 1990 levels.

Countries are not obliged to adhere to such annual reductions, but if they do not achieve them, it means that larger emission cuts will have to be achieved closer to



Carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector continued to increase over the 2005-2006 period (Photo: EUobserver.com)

the target date of 2010.

"This data is alarming," said Sonja Meister, a climate campaigner with Friends of the Earth Europe. "The EU will only be able to fight dangerous climate change if all member states reduce their emissions year on year."

The environmental group argues that the European Commission should be given the power to ensure that EU states comply with their targets.

"Time is running out and only strong legislation including annual cuts will bring the EU on track to meet its long-term targets," said Ms Meister.

Meanwhile, carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector continued to increase over the 2005-2006 period, and large growth in all greenhouse gas emissions continued apace in the aviation and shipping sectors.

The data is troubling for the EU. If the earlier Kyoto reduction targets are not on schedule to be met, this brings into question how realistic the more ambitious new goals of a reduction of 20 percent by 2020, agreed to by EU leaders last spring.

Additionally, the decrease in EU-15 emissions was due to 2006's unusually warmer weather – meaning that people did not have to heat their homes as much – rather than as a result of political movement on the part of governments.

Furthermore, CO₂ emissions also continued to climb in the newest 12 EU member states – a development that produced a mild rebuke from environment commissioner Stavros Dimas.

"The emission increases in the majority of EU-12 countries are not helpful," he said.

"The EU-12 countries have to bear in mind that they cannot rely on the successes of the past," he added, referring to the large drop in carbon emissions experienced in eastern Europe as a result of the sharp decline in the countries' economies following the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

"Our targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions after 2012 are for the EU-27 together," he continued, "and a continuous effort will be required by all member states to achieve them."

Across the EU, heavier use of coal for power and heat production resulted in an increase of 15.4 million tonnes of CO₂ from this sector. Poland alone accounted for an increase of 7.6 million tonnes of emissions for power and heat production.

Of the EU-15, Denmark and Finland experienced the biggest relative increase in GHG emissions (10.9% and 16.3 % respectively), due to heavier use of solid fossil fuels for power generation.

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