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## U.S. May Not Meet Greenhouse Gas Emissions Pledge without More Action

New rules on power plants, methane curbs and energy efficiency measures could help meet U.S. target for emission reductions

By Lisa Friedman and ClimateWire | Thursday, February 7, 2013 | 7 comments

The United States is not on track to meet its Copenhagen climate change target, according to a new major study that could undermine the Obama administration's claims to the international community that it is headed in the right direction.

The findings from the World Resources Institute show the United States could still achieve its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 17 percent below 2005 levels by the end of this decade even if Congress won't pass legislation. It urges a "go-getter" approach that combines rules on power plants, curbing methane, strong state policies and energy efficiency measures.

"The U.S. is not yet on track or hit its 17 percent reduction target, but we have the tools to get there," lead author Nicholas Bianco said. "It would require significant, ambitious action by the administration. Anything less than that, and we fall short."

A State Department spokeswoman said the Obama administration is aware of the report and reviewing it but declined to comment on the findings. State Department officials also declined to discuss remarks that Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern made at the most recent U.N. global warming meeting, claiming the United States is "making good progress" on the commitment it made at the 2009 U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Climate change activists, eager to see the administration take bold action on power plant emissions and push for an international global warming treaty in 2015, avoided criticizing Stern. Some noted that in the same speech, Stern also acknowledged that the United States must do more to reduce emissions.

Still, the absence of a clear outline -- as so many other nations have produced -- from the Obama administration about how it intends to keep its emissions promise is a continuing point of contention among activists and some lawmakers.

"This report reminds us of the urgent need to address climate change, and that the Administration could achieve by 2020 our goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 17 percent below 2005 levels, through 'go-getter action' under current law," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, (D-R.I.) said in a statement.

### Call for a plan



**EMISSIONS PLEDGE:** The U.S. has pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels by the end of this decade, but will require greater effort to meet that promise.

*Image: Official White House Photo by Pete Souza*

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Whitehouse noted that his newly formed Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change "has asked the Obama administration to outline a plan to accomplish that goal, and I hope they do so soon."

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), who helped lead a failed charge for carbon cap-and-trade legislation during Obama's first term, said in a statement that the WRI report "reaffirms the urgency of climate change threat and the pressing need to take action."

He praised past administration regulations and called the report an "important source of ideas" as Obama develops "an aggressive plan for administrative action."

The WRI study comes on the heels of an analysis by the nonprofit group Resources for the Future. That analysis -- which Stern and other State Department officials cited repeatedly at the United Nations -- found that the administration was in fact on target. Yesterday, the authors of the newest report said that the two analyses differ more in "messaging" than in substance.

Specifically, the WRI report calls for "immediately" moving, under the Clean Air Act, to reduce emissions from power plants and natural gas systems, two sectors that analysts said represent the best opportunities for short-term carbon cuts. It also urges the United States to pursue both internationally and domestically reductions of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which are used as refrigerants, and calls on states to complement federal actions with energy efficiency, renewables, transportation and other measures.

Alden Meyer, director of policy and strategy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the administration also needs to start thinking about its strategy for reductions long after 2020.

"In the long term, to get on a path to near-total decarbonization of our economy by midcentury, we need to have Congress on board eventually," he said.


[Click here to view the WRI analysis.](#)

*Reporter Evan Lehmann contributed.*

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