



What effect has President Trump had?

United States withdrawal from the Paris Agreement

On 1 June 2017 President Trump announced that he intended to withdraw the United States of America (USA) from the Paris Climate Agreement. The Paris Agreement, or Accord de Paris, is an agreement between the world's 197 countries to act together to tackle Climate Change.

2020 date: The Agreement's rules mean that the USA can't actually withdraw until 4 November 2020. The US House of Representativesⁱ passed a resolution (May 2019) which will keep the US in the Paris Agreement. However, their resolution has to get past the Senate which is very unlikely.

Reversing policies: President Trump lost no time in unpicking environmental regulations President Obama had either brought in or planned. The Climate Action Plan was cut as soon as President Trump took office and the term 'Climate Change' was removed from the White House website. The way that air pollution is calculatedⁱⁱ is being changed and paved the way for Obama's Clean Power Plan to be repealedⁱⁱⁱ. The new rule will mean less restrictions on coal plant emissions.



Image Walter Seigmund

Why did President Trump make this move?

President Trump said "I'm thinking about the miners all over this country. We're gonna put the miners back to work". He believes the Paris Agreement is 'unfair' to the United States saying it:



Image Wikipedia

- * Allows China to increase their emissions for a while but the United States would have to continue to reduce its emissions
- * Is expensive and will lead to job losses
- * Prevents America from rebuilding their coal industry.

What will be the effect on emissions?

At Paris in 2015, the US volunteered to reduce its emissions by 17% by 2020, and by 26-28% by 2025, relative to 2005 levels. A 'Climate Action Tracker' briefing^{iv} shows that withdrawing from this pledge will mean that instead of showing the planned reduction of approximately 13%, **USA emissions in 2025 will be roughly the same as now.**^v

If this is the case, the difference in CO₂ emissions amounts to about 650 megatonnes or around 2% of current global emissions. Although this may not seem much, other countries are aiming to reduce their emissions in the long term and so the gap between the USA and the rest of the world will become more and more significant.

Emissions in the balance

Despite President Trump's promise to bring back coal, the reduction in profits to be made may yet make it a very difficult promise to keep, as in this Scientific American journal article^{vi}. Coal has been becoming uncompetitive for a long time and for reasons beyond environmental regulations.

However, USA is now the biggest producer of oil in the world, this year producing an all time record of 12.5 million barrels per day^{vii}. The news agency Bloomberg reported that USA is exporting hydrocarbons (crude oil, diesel, gasoline, propane) to other countries at a record rate^{viii}.



Image Pfc Jeremiah Handeland

Within USA, there has been a huge increase in cheap natural gas available with fracking technology, which the President can't alter. As well, almost as many people are now employed in the US wind power industry (90,000) as there are in coal (100,000). The substitution of gas for coal and the growth of renewable energy, such as this solar power plant in the Mojave Desert, have had a combined impact and there has been a continuing decline in CO₂ emissions in USA since 2015.

Although the EC Joint Research Centre reports^{ix} (p.11) emissions in 2017 to be down by 14.3% from 2005 levels, the situation in USA is still thought to be critically in the balance because of the policy choices of President Trump.

Where is the inside pressure to reduce emissions?

US states and cities

Although President Trump can affect Federal Laws, in the USA individual State Governors and City Mayors have very significant power and influence. Many State Governors and City Mayors are pressing ahead with actions as though the US were maintaining its commitment to emission cuts pledged at Paris. California^x is especially at risk and has set ambitious climate change goals and strategies into law. Cities such as New York, San Francisco, Miami and Houston have also stepped up their actions^{xi}.

Legal challenges

There are many legal challenges being made to the US Federal Government's actions and plans to abandon climate-related environmental policies. For example when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a more fossil-fuel friendly rule to replace the Clean Power Plan, 17 states jumped into action^{xii}.

21 young people^{xiii} put forward what might yet be the strongest legal challenge: *Juliana v United States*. Their 2015 lawsuit is that the US government has violated their rights by actively encouraging and allowing activities harmful to their right to life. A District Court judge in 2016 upheld a fundamental right to a clean environment. The US government is still trying to have the case dismissed^{xiv}.



Image Peg Hunter

Questions to explore (please also see references overleaf)

1. How likely is it that a new President will be elected in November 2020, just when the United States plans to actually leave the Paris Agreement?
2. If a new President quickly reversed the decision, would policy reversals mean that US emissions in 2025 ended up somewhere in between where they are now and the level pledged at Paris?
3. How much can be achieved through the unilateral climate action by individual States and cities, many of which have said they want to continue with emission reductions initiatives?
4. How important is the stance being taken by big companies such as Facebook and Apple?

- i <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/02/house-democrats-paris-climate-change-agreement-bill>
- ii <https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/proposal-affordable-clean-energy-ace-rule>
- iii <https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/affordable-clean-energy-rule>
- iv <https://climateactiontracker.org/publications/action-by-china-and-india-slows-emissions-growth-president-trumps-policies-likely-to-cause-us-emissions-to-flatten/>
- v <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/usa/>
- vi <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trump-cannot-bring-back-coal/>
- vii <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/US-Total-Oil-Output-Poised-To-Set-New-2019-Record.html>
- viii <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-12/u-s-fuels-the-world-as-shale-boom-powers-record-oil-exports>
- ix <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/41811494-f131-11e8-9982-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- x <https://www.climatechange.ca.gov/>
- xi <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jun/12/climate-change-trump-new-york-city-san-francisco-houston-miami>
- xii <https://www.climateliabilitynews.org/2018/08/22/climate-regulation-epa-liability/>
- xiii <https://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/>
- xiv <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2018-07-20/juliana-vs-us-a-case-of-perpetual-motions/>

Whilst we strive to provide only links to useful and ethical websites, we have no control over their content. The links do not imply a recommendation for all the content found on these sites.