

# U.S. Moves to Reduce Global Warming Emissions

Photo



The White House has secured voluntary agreements from some of the nation's largest companies to scale down or phase out their use of factory-made gases used in air conditioning and refrigeration. Credit Al Behrman/Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration on Tuesday announced a series of moves aimed at cutting emissions of hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, powerful greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

The White House has secured voluntary agreements from some of the nation's largest companies to scale down or phase out their use of HFCs, which are factory-made gases used in air conditioning and refrigeration. Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Red Bull, Kroger, Honeywell and DuPont, the company that invented fluorinated refrigerants, have agreed to cut their use and replace them with climate-friendly alternatives.

Over all, the administration estimated that the agreements announced on Tuesday would reduce cumulative global consumption of HFCs by the equivalent of 700 million metric tons of carbon dioxide through 2025. That is about 1.5 percent of the world's 2010 greenhouse gas emissions, or the same as taking 15 million cars off the road for 10 years.

The announcement came a week before President Obama is expected to join over 100 other world leaders at a United Nations climate change summit in New York, which will begin 15 months of

negotiations as leaders work toward a global climate change agreement in Paris next year.

The primary focus of that deal will be to push for enactment of new laws around the world aimed at cutting emissions of carbon dioxide, the abundant planet-warming gas caused by burning fossil fuels such as oil and coal. Negotiators anticipate it will take a grueling battle to achieve such an agreement, which would require the world's largest economies — including the United States, China and India — to greatly cut their use of burning coal and oil.

But climate policy advocates say small steps aimed at reducing other greenhouse gases will also help. While HFCs are less abundant in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, they have 10,000 times the planet-warming potency. But carbon dioxide lingers in the atmosphere for centuries, while HFCs disintegrate after about 15 years.

“Every drumbeat in this symphony helps. It drives it along. This is part of that drumbeat,” said Durwood Zaelke, president of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development, a research organization. “The benefits from cutting non-CO<sub>2</sub> come much faster,” he added. “CO<sub>2</sub> is like a supertanker — you can stop it, but it keeps drifting for a long time. Cutting HFCs are like stopping a steamboat. You stop it and that's that.”

Tuesday's announcement also came as part of the Obama administration's efforts to push for an amendment to the 1987 Montreal Protocol, aimed at decreasing HFCs worldwide. That agreement was designed to cut emissions of gases that harm the ozone layer. Last year, the Obama administration announced an agreement with China to jointly work toward phasing down HFCs in both countries.

The administration has directed federal agencies to purchase alternatives to HFCs whenever possible, to work on expanding a list of HFC alternatives, and to fund Energy Department research into HFC alternative technologies.

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