



## IEAGHG Information Paper; 2013-IP8: US Champions Bilateral Agreements

**Background:** Article available at: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=us-pledges-climate-deals-with-china-and-japan>

The USA has recently signed climate change agreements with China and Japan. Both declarations of cooperation stressed practical measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Analysts said the agreement between the United States and China – “has the makings of a major move forward, putting the world's two largest emitters at the centre of serious clean energy work”.

Speaking at a clean energy seminar in Beijing, Senator John Kerry said that "China and the United States represent the world's two biggest economies, we represent the world's two largest consumers of energy, and we represent the two largest emitters of global greenhouse gases. So if any two nations come to this table with an imperative for action, it is us," Kerry said.

"What the United States and China decide to do with respect to this, whatever energy initiative we embrace together ... the two largest economies in the world will send a signal to the world about how serious we are about this," he said.

As part of the agreement, the United States and China put climate change on the agenda for a high-level meeting of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, which meets in July. Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern will lead the climate change working group to the dialogue, partnering with China's lead climate official, Xie Zhenhua, vice chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission. The two will be charged with "identifying new areas for concrete, cooperative action to foster green and low-carbon economic growth, including through the use of public-private partnerships, where appropriate."

The United States and Japan, meanwhile, agreed to hold new bilateral talks on a range of climate issues.

The agreements come just days after a meeting of the Major Economies Forum, where leaders of the world's major economies -- which also happen to be the biggest emitters -- announced they will create a voluntary coalition centred on building efficiency.

The effort is one of many "alternative mechanisms" that have been kicked around at the State Department as ways to encourage nations to make real reductions in emissions while avoiding the sticky questions of responsibility that weigh down the U.N. climate talks (1).

The initial focus on buildings is likely to be patterned after the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which focuses on agreements to reduce so-called short-lived climate pollutants like methane and hydrofluorocarbons (2). According to the State Department, the efforts will be "fleshed out further over the coming months" and will "serve as a complement" to the U.N. climate convention.

Critics argue that building efficiency is unlikely to capture the public imagination as a bold new way to fight climate change. But supporters argue that unlike issues wildly popular with environmental groups -- like eliminating subsidies for fossil fuels -- an agreement on building efficiency is actually politically feasible.

Meanwhile, improving building efficiency globally could have a potentially huge impact on emissions. According to the U.N. Environment Programme, buildings contribute to 30% of global climate change and consume 40% of global energy.

A major new report due out soon by the Climate Policy Initiative (CPI) also points to building efficiency as a sector ripe for international cooperation, but not without problems (3). While some



countries have made substantial improvements in heating, cooling and lighting, new energy gobblers like appliances and electronics "have more than offset efficiency gains in China and have just about balanced efficiency gains in Europe." In the United States, according to the study, building efficiency gains have just caught up with slowing floor space growth.

The study also lays the groundwork for exploring other joint climate policies. The authors make the case that understanding how and why major emitters like the United States, China, India and Brazil design energy policies should inform negotiators to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change designing a new global agreement.

"The world has moved on from the expectations that underlie the on-going climate negotiations, but the negotiations have not," they argue. "There is very little reason to believe developing countries will be willing to take on targets in some sort of relatively uniform formula, and even less reason to believe very large amounts of money are going to be transferred from the troubled developed economies to the emergent developing nations."

But, they noted, "While international climate negotiations may be currently trapped in an old paradigm, climate policy activity has moved forward at the national and subnational level in both the developed and the developing world, most often motivated by economic and other forms of self-interest."

#### Further Reading

- (1) Climatewire: [www.eenews.net](http://www.eenews.net), 202-628-6500
- (2) IEAGHG Information Paper; 2012-IP20: The Climate and Clean Air Coalition
- (3) <http://climatepolicyinitiative.org/press-release/national-climate-policy-progressed-in-the-last-decade-despite-stalled-global-negotiations/>

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April 2013