

## **This week world environment ministers meet in Bonn to revive the Kyoto Protocol - in the face of US opposition.**

### **Geoffrey Lean guides us through the choices facing them to save the planet.**

Pray silence for George Bush, President of the United States, on the Kyoto Protocol, the world's best - and probably last - chance of averting catastrophic global warming. "We would not accept," he insisted recently, "a treaty that I thought made sense for the country." Yes, of course, this was yet another of the President's "mis-speaks". But, for once, he got it right. Overwhelming evidence shows that the protocol - which he is doing all he can to kill - would make sense for the US. The President, of course - in his more articulate moments - says the opposite. He claims that the treaty, which would, cut the pollution that causes climate change, is "fatally flawed". He says it is "unfair" to the United States because it does not oblige Third World countries - as well as rich ones - to make immediate cuts. And, he says, it would impose "Draconian costs" on the US economy.

This week environment ministers from around the world meet in Bonn to see if the protocol - pronounced "dead" by the Bush administration in March - can still be kept alive. They will revive negotiations that collapsed in The Hague in November on how to put into practice the provisions of the protocol, which all sides agreed three-and-a-half years ago. Despite huge opposition both at home and abroad, President Bush shows no sign of changing his mind. The world now has to decide how to react (see 5 Ways to below). But in fact it would be to everyone's benefit, including the President's own, if he did accept Kyoto. His objections to it do not bear examination.

First, it has long been agreed that the industrialised countries, which contributed four-fifths of all the carbon dioxide warming up the atmosphere, should be the first to cut the pollution. That hardly seems "unfair". Nevertheless, China - a country Mr Bush singles out for being given an unfair advantage - has slashed emissions of carbon dioxide by 17 percent since the mid-1990s, while its economy grew by one third: by contrast the US has increased its pollution by 16 per cent since 1990.

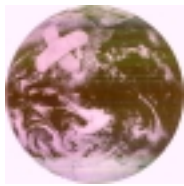
Secondly, the United States would not be damaged by Kyoto. Senior British officials say that it would trim an expected 30 per cent growth in the US economy by just 0.6 per cent.

Research by Mr Bush's own Department of Energy estimates that the US could cut its emissions by 75 per cent - 10 times as much as specified by Kyoto - at no net cost to the economy. A study by the World Wildlife Fund published last week estimates that implementing the treaty would save the country \$50bn (£31bn) a year by 2010 in fuel and related costs. The country will suffer if global warming goes unchecked. Florida, which gave Bush his dubious election victory, is particularly vulnerable to rises in the sea level. A US National Academy of Sciences report - set up by the President - said that America's breadbasket, the Great Plains, will be hit particularly hard.

Finally, Kyoto could do wonders for Bush himself. His popularity is failing fast and his global warming stance is largely to blame. Polls show that Americans believe, by a majority of seven to one, that he puts the interests of his friends in the energy industries before the environment. In the face of this the President has been trying to appear more green. But no one believes that he will accept the Kyoto Protocol. It makes too much sense, you see.

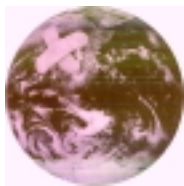
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## 5 Ways to Save the Planet



### **(1) Stick to how things are**

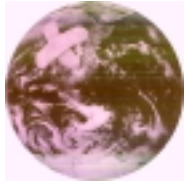
George Bush's Preferred option. America would love an impasse in Bonn. It could then say that crumpled under its own contradictions, claim that this justified the US policy, and escape the blame. There's a good chance the President will get his wish, but the problem is that Kyoto is the only game on town. The US hasn't thought of an alternative. Meanwhile time is running out.



### **(2) Search for a compromise**

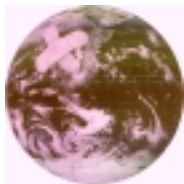
Some leaders, including Jan Pronk the Dutch Environment Minister, are already suggesting that the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol, already agreed by the US, could be renegotiated to make them more acceptable to the Bush administration. It sounds superficially attractive. But the treaty was carefully balanced which took seven years to put together.

Untying it would cause chaos, with many nations as well as the US trying to negotiate a better deal for themselves. It would take a great deal of time, it would almost certainly greatly weaken the treaty, and there would be no assurance that the US, or anyone else, would reach agreement at the end of the process.



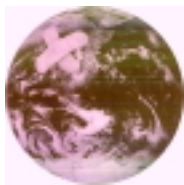
### **(3) Make Kyoto work without the US**

The Kyoto Protocol could - just - be brought into force without the United States. For this to happen it has to be ratified by countries accounting for 55 per cent of industrialised nations' emissions of carbon dioxide, the main cause of global warming. If Europe, Japan, Russia and a few smaller countries joined forces, they could just make it. The United States might join later when it saw the rest of the world benefiting economically from reducing pollution and/or it got a new president. The main problem is that Japan is hypersensitive about upsetting the US, and so might not join in. The rest of the world, apart from the US, would have to agree the details of how to implement Kyoto in Bonn or soon after. But it remains the best hope for saving the protocol, and averting disastrous climate change.



### **(4) Bring world leaders into play, too**

Global warming is far too important to be left to environment ministers who turn up at the negotiations at venues such as The Hague or Bonn. As it perhaps the greatest challenge facing the world, it is perhaps time that the heads of government themselves took a grip and reached agreement at the highest level. This has already begun to happen. Bill Clinton, Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair have all taken initiatives at critical points in the process. There is a big chance this week when the G8 summit at Genoa coincides with the critical point in the negotiations in Bonn.



### **(5) How about being really daring?**

The fastest-growing idea for controlling global warming was thought up by the tiny Global Commons Institute in London. Inelegantly called "contraction and convergence", it proposes deciding the amount of pollution that the climate can stand, and then sharing this out in national quotas, giving each person on Earth the same level of emissions. Countries would then move towards these goals - with poor ones increasing, and rich ones reducing, their burning of fossil fuels. Eventually any long-term strategy to beat global warming will probably look something like this.