



FRANKFURT: A crow flies with a walnut in its beak in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, yesterday. —AFP

INDIA UNDER PRESSURE ON HFCs AS WORLD SEEKS CLIMATE ACCORD

OSLO/WASHINGTON: India will face pressure to speed up its plans for cutting greenhouse gases used in refrigerators, air conditioning and aerosols when governments meet this week to hammer out what would be a third key deal to limit climate change in a month.

About 150 nations meet in Rwanda, from Oct. 10-14 to try to agree a phase down of factory-made hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) gases. US Secretary of State John Kerry will be among those attending.

A quick phase-down of HFCs could be a big contribution to slow climate change, avoiding perhaps 0.5 degree Celsius (0.9 Fahrenheit) of a projected rise in average temperatures by 2100, scientists say. But India wants a peak in poor nations' rising emissions only in 2031, to give industries time to adapt. More than 100 other nations including the United States, the European Union and African states, favour a peak in 2021.

"It really does matter how early the agreement kicks in," said Jake Schmidt, of the U.S. Natural Resources Defense Council, which reckons India's proposal would add the equivalent of almost a year of global carbon emissions to the atmosphere. "We must get enough time before the phasing out period starts. We are very clear," Indian Environment Minister Anil Madhav Dave said on Oct. 1, according to the Times of India.

Use of HFCs, which can be 10,000 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as greenhouse gases, is already declining in many rich nations. An HFC accord would be the third big step this month to curb global warming after the 2015 Paris Agreement for a global shift from fossil fuels gained enough backing to enter into force and

governments agreed a deal to limit emissions from aviation.

President Barack Obama, hailing the Paris Agreement at the White House last week, said HFCs and aviation would also help "build a world that is safer and more prosperous and more secure".

The U.S. president has been keen to secure global climate agreements, meant to limit rising sea levels, droughts, floods and heatwaves, as part of his legacy. Last month, 16 governments including the United States, Japan and Germany and private donors such as Microsoft founder Bill Gates agreed an \$80 million fund to help an early phase down of HFCs, hoping to persuade developing nations to sign up.

Many industries are already moving. "Unlikely as it may seem, a global HFC phase-down is backed both by leading environmental groups and the industry that makes and uses these chemicals," said Frank Maisano, of the US Air-conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute which represents companies such as Carrier Corp or Honeywell.

"We and many others in the industry have started to phase out HFCs. But the process is not completed," said Daniel Frykholm, spokesman for Sweden's Electrolux which wants to halve its greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 from 2005 levels.

The HFC talks are part of the 1987 Montreal Protocol, which succeeded in cutting the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) to help protect the ozone layer, which shields the planet from ultraviolet rays that can cause skin cancer. But the HFCs that have often replaced them, while better for the ozone layer, are powerful greenhouse gases. — Reuters

WASHINGTON VOTERS TO DECIDE ON NATION'S FIRST CARBON TAX

CALL FOR SLAPPING DIRECT CARBON TAX ON BURNING FOSSIL FUELS

SEATTLE: Washington lawmakers have tried and failed in recent years to make polluters pay for their carbon emissions to fight climate change. Now, voters will get to decide. An initiative on the November ballot asks voters whether the state should impose the nation's first direct carbon tax on the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and gasoline.

Sponsors say residents have a moral responsibility to curb greenhouse gas emissions, and a carbon tax is the best way to do it. The tax encourages businesses to conserve or switch to clean energy by making fossil fuels more expensive, and it makes the tax system fairer by using the revenues to reduce other taxes, they say. Businesses say the tax will drive up fuel and energy costs and put Washington companies at a competitive disadvantage.

And in a move that has bewildered some, major environmental and other groups - including those that backed Gov. Jay Inslee's proposal last year to cap emissions and make carbon polluters pay - oppose the initiative. They say it takes the wrong approach.

Yoram Bauman, an economist who founded Carbon Washington, the grassroots group that gathered more than 350,000 signatures to qualify Initiative 732, defended it as great climate and tax policy. "It does almost everything right for Washington," he said.

Audubon Washington supports it. "Our members came down on the side of urgency. We don't have time to wait," said Gail Gatton, the group's executive director. "Climate change is happening, and this is our best available option right now to protect birds."

Carbon-pricing

But the Sierra Club, Washington Environmental Council and the advocacy group Front and Centered say the initiative is the wrong carbon-pricing approach and will hurt the state's revenues. Whereas Inslee's pollution fee would have raised money for education, transportation, clean energy and programs to help disadvantaged communities affected by climate change, Initiative 732 provides no such investments, critics say. "It's not a path that makes sense for our communities," said Rich Stolz, executive director of OneAmerica, which works on social justice issues. Stolz said the initiative ignores climate justice and lacks input from communities of color.

Stolz's group is part of a coalition that worked on an alternative carbon-pricing measure. Last-minute talks between that coalition and I-732 supporters to collaborate on one ballot measure fizzled last year. The initiative is designed to be revenue neutral, meaning the tax revenue increase from fossil fuels would be mostly offset by decreases in other taxes. In this case, revenues would be returned to people and businesses by cutting the state sales tax by one point, virtually eliminating business taxes for manufacturers and providing rebates for working families, sponsors say.

A state analysis, however, estimates the measure could cost the state about \$800 million in lost revenues over the first six fiscal years. Initiative sponsors dispute the state's analysis, saying it double-counted the rebates in the first year. The carbon tax is modeled after one in the nearby Canadian province of British Columbia. California has a cap-and-trade program, which limits emissions and allows carbon polluters to buy and trade pollution credits. If approved, Washington's carbon tax starts at \$15 a ton of carbon emissions in July, goes up to \$25 the next year and incrementally increases afterward.

The Washington State Tree Fruit Association, which represents growers, packers and marketers, is among those opposed. It takes a lot of fuel to grow and transport produce, and the tax will be paid by those in the state, not competitors outside it, said Jon Devaney, the group's president.



WASHINGTON: A Tesoro Corp refinery, including a gas flare flame that is part of normal plant operations, is shown in Anacortes, Washington after a fatal overnight fire and explosion. — AP



WASHINGTON: Carbon Washington campaign organizer Ben Silesky, left, leads a group of supporters and organization members into the Elections Office for the Washington Secretary of State in Olympia, Washington to deliver signatures in support of putting Initiative 732 on the ballot. — AP

"Raising food prices in Washington state will make us less competitive compared to others," he said.

Initiative sponsors say a \$25 carbon tax would raise the price of gasoline by about 25 cents per gallon and the price of coal-fired electricity by about 2.5 cents per kilowatt-hour. They say power plants and fuel suppliers likely will pass those costs on to consumers, but that consumers will see price reductions in other things

they buy because the sales tax is cut. The tax wouldn't apply to electricity from renewables like hydro, wind or solar power.

The campaign has raised \$1.2 million from nearly 1,200 unique donors; more than half of those total contributions are under \$200. The No on 732 campaign sponsored by the Association of Washington Business has raised \$300,000 to oppose the tax. — AP

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