

# Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang | Obama on His Own

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By Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang, *truthout* | Op-Ed | name.

In Copenhagen, a major binding agreement at the global warming summit is not to be. Not this year. In Washington, the Senate is so divided that it became clear months ago that climate legislation will be pushed off until 2010 at the earliest.

Still, the United States can meet the challenge of a world demanding that it take the lead on global warming. Here's how:

Using his executive authority, President Barack Obama can instruct power plants to slash emissions, order new efficiency standards to cut the energy used by consumer and commercial appliance, and help the world's least developed nations use solar power - rather than heavily polluting wood fires - for cooking.

If he does so, he will send a strong signal that Washington is leading the world away from a dangerous warming of the climate. He will head to Copenhagen next week armed with powerful tools to challenge negotiators to produce an agreement with real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

He will step smartly toward meeting - and moving beyond - his pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by roughly 17 percent by 2020, compared with 2005 levels. And these are just a few of the real and measurable reductions he can order with a stroke of a presidential pen.

Motor vehicles and power plants account for two-thirds of the nation's emissions of carbon dioxide, the main global warming gas.

Tackling pollution from America's ubiquitous motor vehicles, Obama has ordered that by 2016 the new cars and light trucks sold in the United States cut their tailpipe emissions by 30 percent. It is the biggest single step in US history to reduce the nation's global warming pollution, and a significant down payment demonstrating the president's willingness to act.

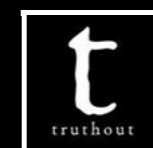
Complementing that decision, Obama can order the Environmental Protection Agency to use the Clean Air Act to issue new rules cutting the heat-trapping emissions from major power plants, oil refineries, and other big industrial sources. These rules can require coal-fired power plants to switch to cleaner natural gas.

Converting the 100 dirtiest plants would cut pollution from coal-fired power facilities by 15 percent, according to David Bookbinder, the Sierra Club's chief climate counsel. "It's incredibly efficient as a step to save carbon dioxide emissions," he said. To be

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sure, polluters would seek to slow the changeover by challenging the rule in court. The administration would need to act vigorously, seeking quick court action and pressuring polluters to innovate, not litigate.

Obama can also act to cut energy use. He can reduce demand for electricity by speeding up new standards for household and commercial appliances - from window air conditioners and microwave ovens to walk-in freezers and commercial boilers. Less use of electricity means less coal is burned to produce it. As Energy Secretary Steven Chu put it, "Energy efficiency can be improved very quickly.... Appliance standards, ka-BOOM, can be had right away."

By 2020, current standards will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 6.5 percent. Obama can toughen new standards and accelerate their start date, for an additional reduction of 1.3 percent over the same period, the Appliance Standards Awareness Project determined in a report published in July.

The United Nations estimates that 2.5 billion people rely on wood, dung and other dirty fuels for cooking. The short-lived black carbon, or soot, from their fires causes a significant amount of global warming. Reducing it would quickly scale back some heat-trapping emissions, giving us more time to deal with the long-range carbon dioxide problem.

Obama can expand projects in the developing world that have been funded by the US Agency for International Development and the EPA, and send solar cookers to impoverished people from Haiti to Kenya to Nepal.

It is not unusual, says Paul Munsen, president of Sun Ovens International Inc., which sells solar cookers, for a family to spend half its income on charcoal, or many of its waking hours scavenging for wood. Trading some of the fires for solar stoves would save money, time, forests - and a significant amount of emissions.

Simple cardboard and aluminum stoves are manufactured for as little as \$8 each, according to Solar Cookers International, a nonprofit organization that distributes solar stoves to impoverished communities abroad.

The world's largest climate polluter until recently, the United States (now second to China) has an obligation to lead and the resources and technology to act.

With its clean-car order, the Obama administration has already taken the first powerful step to reduce America's carbon footprint. Without waiting for Congress, the administration's effort can expand beyond high-tech clean cars to include cleaner power plants, more-efficient freezers and even low-tech solar cookers.

Taking the initiative, Obama would challenge the major countries in the developed and developing world to step up the fight against global warming. Most important, he would improve the odds that the Copenhagen negotiations will set the world on the path toward a sound climate treaty.

*NOTE: This article has been Cross-posted with Truthdig.com and Huffington Post.*



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