

Warned on future, nations look at clean energy

July 20 2010, by Shaun Tandon



A worker installs solar panels on the roof of a building in the northern German city of Bremen. Some of the world's most developed nations are expected to announce initiatives to cooperate on clean energy after a top policy board warned that the world's current path on power was unsustainable.

Some of the world's most developed nations were expected Tuesday to announce initiatives to cooperate on clean energy after a top policy board warned that the world's current path on power was unsustainable.

Senior officials from 21 economies making up 80 percent of global Gross Domestic Product were holding talks Monday and Tuesday in Washington in a US initiative billed as the highest-level meeting yet on shifting to [green energy](#).

While few expect announcements Tuesday to be ground-breaking, they would mark a rare point of common ground amid a stalemate in global negotiations on drafting a new climate treaty.

"The goal here is not to discuss what one might agree upon," said US Energy Secretary Steven Chu, the meeting's host. "Our goal here today is to take concrete actions."

The meeting opened to a dire warning from Nobuo Tanaka, executive director of the [International Energy Agency](#) (IEA), which advises major economies, who invoked the three-month BP oil spill in the [Gulf of Mexico](#).

"Without major changes to the way we produce and in energy use, we will confront untenable risks to our collective energy security and to the environment in the future," Tanaka told the delegates.

"Indeed, the Deepwater Horizon accident in the Gulf of Mexico is a tragic reminder of this," he said.

The IEA said in a recent study that barring a shift from fossil fuels, energy-related [carbon dioxide emissions](#) -- which are blamed for global warming -- would nearly double by 2050.

The IEA said that, even leaving aside environmental benefits, a decision to make more than half of light vehicles eco-friendly by 2050 would save global consumers 112 trillion dollars -- although the costs of adjustment would be 46 trillion dollars.

"We still have formidable challenges before us, but each day we wait, the challenge becomes harder. Every year of delay adds 500 billion US dollars to the cost of action," Tanaka said.

Chu later announced one US initiative -- lighter-colored paint on the roof of the Energy Department headquarters along with other agency buildings outside of Washington.

He said the project, to begin this summer, would better cool buildings and reflect more of the sun's heat, leading to thousands of dollars in annual savings on air-conditioning.

"Cool roofs are one of the quickest and lowest cost ways we can reduce our global carbon emissions and begin the hard work of slowing climate change," Chu said, adding that he would recommend that other US departments follow suit.

The energy meeting, which Chu expected to be the first of several, is an offshoot of the US-led Major Economies Forum, a gathering of the biggest nations that is trying to eke out progress in global climate negotiations.

The Kyoto Protocol's obligations on cutting carbon emissions run out at the end of 2012, but key nations have butted heads on what to do afterward.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think-tank, in a study last week recommended cooperation in alternative energy as a way forward on climate, but warned it would not be enough to meet global targets.

The think-tank advised as one step that China and India should join the IEA to coordinate energy policies, saying that considering their consumption levels, "the absence of these two giants is hard to defend."

Tanaka supports bringing the two nations into the IEA, but rules dictate that the two nations would also need to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, meeting the club's standards for market economies.

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