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## GUEST COMMENTARY

### **Control emissions locally**

By Mark Ruzzin

Boulder

Oil, coal and natural gas fuel our cars and trucks, generate most of our electricity, and heat our homes. This comes at a cost, including a variety of air pollutants, among them carbon dioxide. Studies have shown that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are building up rapidly in the Earth's atmosphere, causing global warming.

Global warming is beginning to have adverse impacts, including increased frequency and severity of droughts, heat waves and floods. Global warming is raising sea levels, and new research indicates increasing hurricane intensity. The World Health Organization estimates that global warming is already killing 150,000 people per year.

In order to respond to the dangers of global warming, industrialized countries, including the United States, developed the Kyoto Protocol to the U.N. Framework Convention on Global Climate Change. With ratification to date by the European Union, Japan, Canada, many other industrialized nations, and most recently Russia, Kyoto - with its requirements to reduce carbon dioxide emissions - will become international law on Feb. 16.

This will be a remarkable event, especially since the United States - the nation with just 5 percent of the world's population that is responsible for 25 percent of worldwide carbon dioxide emissions - renounced the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The treaty was ratified by 128 other countries.

To their credit, these nations have not been bullied by U.S. obstinance. Many of them are voluntarily reducing carbon-dioxide emissions. And when the Kyoto Protocol goes into effect, the signers will be mandated to reduce their carbon-dioxide emissions beginning in 2008. That will mark the dawning of a carbon dioxide-constrained world.

But the Kyoto Protocol is just a first step. Much greater emissions reduction will be needed in order to slow down global warming. It is imperative that the United States join other nations in this effort.

The fact that the Bush administration has renounced the Kyoto Protocol does not mean that the United States is failing to make some progress. California, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Oregon have adopted some form of carbon dioxide-emissions limits. And both coasts are beginning to band together to reduce carbon emissions at the regional level.

Other states are adopting policies to increase energy efficiency and accelerate the implementation of renewable energy sources such as wind power and solar energy.

Colorado has begun to confront global warming as well. The renewable energy standard (Amendment 37) recently adopted by voters will lead to a lowering of carbon dioxide emissions from Colorado's electric utilities. Xcel Energy will expand energy-efficiency programs for its customers as a result of the agreement the utility recently reached with environmental groups and just approved by the state Public Utilities Commission. The agreement also requires Xcel to begin accounting for global warming regulatory risk in its resource planning and power plant acquisition decisions.

Aspen, Boulder, Denver and Fort Collins, along with 150 municipalities nationwide, have pledged to take action to combat global warming. Boulder adopted the goals of the Kyoto Protocol in 2002, and is working now to meet its targets, with the city council appropriating \$516,000 over the next two years for a variety of energy efficiency and conservation programs.

More jurisdictions should adopt firm carbon dioxide-emissions caps and develop strategies for steadily reducing emissions, engaging their residents and local businesses in this critical and challenging effort.

A carbon-constrained world does not necessarily mean economic sacrifice or lower standards of living. A gradual but steady transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy sources, along with increased energy efficiency, can save consumers and businesses money, support more jobs, improve public health and limit global warming. Once enough cities and states embrace this transition, the federal government will join by default.

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