

US mayors don't wait for Washington on warming

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Reuters

Wed Nov 15, 2006 11:54 AM ET

WASHINGTON, Nov 15 (Reuters) - U.S. mayors who fight global warming at city hall, on city streets and at the city dump swapped strategies this week at a snowed-in summit in Utah, and some hoped the federal government would follow their lead. Even as Bush administration officials rejected calls on Wednesday to curb greenhouse gas emissions, at least two American mayors said their cities were exceeding goals set out in the Kyoto Protocol meant to stem global climate change. Other municipal leaders are working to meet these targets.

"Everybody knows now that the Kyoto goals are not going to be anywhere near adequate," said Mayor Rocky Anderson of Salt Lake City. "The United States has been a huge obstacle to this process so far, but cities are taking up the slack."

Anderson, a Democrat in the strongly Republican state of Utah, said his city has cut greenhouse gas emissions by 21 percent compared to what they were in 1991. The Kyoto Protocol calls for at least 5 percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2012.

President George W. Bush withdrew from the U.N.'s Kyoto agreement in 2001, saying limits on U.S. emissions of greenhouse gases -- which trap heat near Earth's surface like the glass walls of a greenhouse -- would cost jobs and wrongly excluded developing countries from its goals for 2012.

And on Wednesday, at a meeting of 70 environmental ministers in Kenya, the United States rejected a call to rejoin the Kyoto agreement, saying the United States would slow the rise of emissions but would not agree to cap them.

Some 320 U.S. mayors are working to reach the Kyoto goals for their cities, Anderson said in a telephone interview from Sundance, Utah, about 30 miles (48 km) south of Salt Lake.

ECO-FRIENDLY 'CHARIOTS'

The mayors' gathering was hosted in part by the filmmaker and environmentalist Robert Redford, who also runs the Sundance Film Festival in Park City.

"Rather than looking negatively at global warming, which we certainly can do as the evidence has increased, there's also a time for optimism ... it could be applied to this (summit) because of all the solutions that are available," Redford said by telephone.

For example, Anderson and other mayors have cut emissions and saved money by simply switching from incandescent lighting to more energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs in municipal facilities. For Salt Lake City, this meant a saving of \$33,000 a year, and part of this savings was used to buy wind power, Anderson said.

In addition to stepping up recycling efforts and rechanneling methane emissions from the city waste water treatment plant and landfill to producing power, the city has ditched dozens of SUVs for smaller, energy efficient vehicles.

"We have new three-wheeled electric vehicles that look more like chariots, you stand up in them," Anderson said, adding that these are used for traffic enforcement.

In San Francisco, the city joined with the state of California to offer some 4,000 small businesses low-interest loans to upgrade old refrigeration units -- common at small local shops -- to new, more energy-efficient ones.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, has set aside 3 percent of all capital expenditures, or \$4 million a year, to push for energy independence, Mayor Martin Chavez said. Albuquerque has cut greenhouse gas emissions by 63 percent compared to 1990 levels, Chavez said. "We'll do it by ourselves if we have to but it would be so much better to have an ally in the federal government in Washington," he said.