

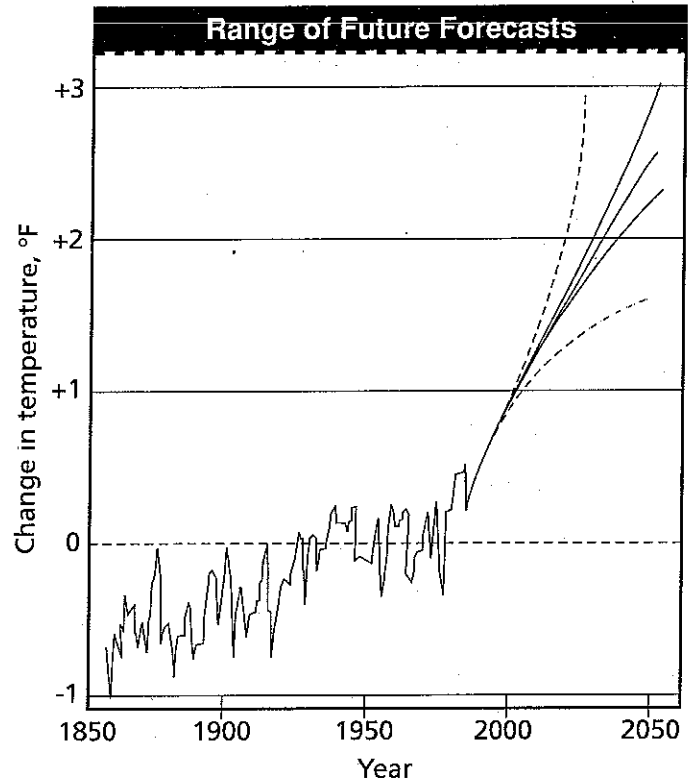
Environmental Issues

Case Studies

Taking a Stand on Global Warming: The Kyoto Protocol

In 1997 diplomats from countries around the globe met in Kyoto, Japan, to draft a treaty aimed at reducing global warming. Many scientists agree that global warming is accelerating because of increased greenhouse gases, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels. In November 2000, diplomats again met in The Hague, Netherlands, to establish the treaty's specific limits on greenhouse gas emissions, which would take effect in 2008.

The goal of the treaty, known as the Kyoto Protocol, is to require industrialized countries to reduce their emissions of six greenhouse gases to a specified level by 2012. However, emissions-reducing strategies cost money. These costs would create hardships for some developing countries, so they are not required to participate in the agreement. The Kyoto Protocol has caused much debate—over whether developing countries should be included in the treaty, over the requirements of the treaty, and over whether the treaty is even necessary.



Source: U.S. Global Change Research Information Office

DIRECTIONS: Read the pro and con arguments below. Then, answer the questions under **Examining the Issue**. Use another sheet of paper for your answers if necessary.

PRO Global warming is a trend that must be stopped before we do irreparable damage to Earth's climate and ecosystems. The Kyoto Protocol is a small beginning toward minimizing the damage. The negative effects of global warming already can be seen in our environment, from the meltdown of Antarctic ice structures to the increasing occurrence of severe droughts and storms. The world community must take a stand against the wasteful and destructive practices that cause global warming, and the Kyoto Protocol is a good place to start.

"Economics aside, there is a far more important yardstick by which to judge Kyoto, and that is the accelerating destabilization of the climate. The science clearly tells us that to restore our atmosphere to a hospitable state we need to cut emissions by a staggering sixty to seventy percent. . . . That is a large task—but it is one that can and must ultimately be achieved using the launching pad known as the Kyoto Protocol."

—Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist
Ross Gelbspan

(continued)

Environmental Issues

Case Studies

CON

The Kyoto Protocol is a treaty with good intentions, but it does not provide realistic solutions. It places the burden of responsibility on developed countries, such as the United States and the European Union, while allowing developing countries the option of continuing "business as usual." We must look to science, not government regulations, to better understand the goals and to develop ways to achieve those goals without crippling our economy. It is important to protect the environment, but the Kyoto Protocol is not the way.

"To be perfectly blunt, the facts I have reviewed lead me to believe that the Kyoto Protocol is seriously flawed—so flawed, in fact, that it cannot be salvaged. The Kyoto treaty is based on immature science, costs too much, leaves too many procedural questions unanswered, is grossly unfair because developing countries such as yourselves are not required to participate, and will do nothing to solve the speculative problem it is intended to solve."

—F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman of the U.S. Committee on Science

Examining the Issue

Recalling Facts

1. What is the Kyoto Protocol? _____

2. Name one reason some people are opposed to the Kyoto Protocol

Critical Thinking Skills

3. **Making Judgments** Given the arguments in the Pro and Con sections above, do you think the Kyoto Protocol should be implemented? Explain your answer.

4. **Making Inferences** Why might a developing country not be able to afford the costs of reducing its emissions?

Investigating Further

Gather in a small group and research the Kyoto Protocol to find out what parts of the treaty people oppose. Decide as a group on the elements that you think should be changed. Write a memo to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—the committee which developed the Kyoto Protocol—explaining the elements they should revise when they meet to rework the treaty.