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Headline: G-20 nations still off-track on climate targets

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Even with updated commitments to reduce planet-warming emissions between now and 2030, industrialized nations still fall far short of what's needed to cut greenhouse gases that cause climate change, according to the latest Emissions Gap Report of the United Nations.

According to the report released on Tuesday, member economies of the Group of 20 (G20) industrialized nations are still "not on track to achieve either their original or new 2030 pledges."

Although they have more robust targets to back their loud voices in terms of climate change, both the United States and Canada are far off-track in meeting even their old commitments. (See related story on Page A9.)

The good news is that 10 of the G-20 members—Argentina, China, the European Union, India, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom—are expected to achieve their original pledges.

These shortcomings "indicate a lack of enhanced ambition," according to the Emissions Gap Report 2021.

Because of the lack of ambition, the report noted that the gains in terms of greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 are now being offset, as global carbon dioxide levels are now bouncing back to pre-pandemic levels.

And even if all 120 countries party to the global climate change agreement meet their updated commitments, that would only take off an additional 7.5 percent of predicted greenhouse gas emissions in 2030.

To keep the global temperature within the 1.5-degree Celsius limit above preindustrial levels, the world would need to cut its total emissions by 55 percent.

If the new pledges continued throughout this century, the report said it would result in a warming of 2.7 C. And that's already the best-case scenario, as most G-20 members still "do not have policies in place to achieve even the NDCs (nationally determined contributions)," it added.

"Climate change is no longer a future problem. It is a 'now problem,'" said Inger Andersen, executive director of the UN Environment Programme. "To stand a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5 C, we have eight years to almost halve greenhouse gas emissions: eight years to make the plans, put in place the policies, implement them, and ultimately deliver the cuts. The clock is ticking loudly."

The report was released only days before the 26th annual UN Climate Change Conference, widely known as Conference of Parties (COP), set to start on Sunday (Oct. 31) until Nov. 12. The first COP was held in Berlin in 1995.

The 1.5-C limit is seen as the threshold beyond which the worst effects of global warming, like heat waves, water shortages, and irreversible ecosystem damage, would be felt more intensely.

To stand a chance of staying on that path, the world has eight years left to take an additional 28 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent off annual emissions.

Currently, annual emissions are close to 60 GT. One GT is equivalent to 1 trillion kilograms.

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“The world has to wake up to the imminent peril we face as a species,” Andersen added. “Nations need to put in place the policies to meet their new commitments, and start implementing them within months.”