CLIMATE NEWS

From Sheldon Whitehouse, Barbara Boxer, and Jeff Merkley
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Northeast Cut Emissions and Enjoyed Economic Growth

Some critics of EPA's new carbon pollution standards for power plants argue that forcing emissions reduction will curtail economic growth. But the experience of states that already cap carbon pollution reveals that emissions reductions and economic growth can go hand in hand. One of the ways states will be able to meet the EPA standards is by joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which places a ceiling on total carbon emissions and issues emissions permits that companies can buy and sell from one another. Since RGGI began in 2009, the participating states—CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NY, RI, and VT—have cut their emissions by 18 percent, while their economies grew by 9.2 percent. By comparison, emissions in the other 41 states fell by 4 percent, while their economies grew by 8.8 percent. The RGGI states had large emissions drops even before 2009, in part because the recession and warmer winters lowered the demand for power. They also began switching to natural gas power, retiring coal units, and adding wind and solar energy. As the economy recovered, RGGI spurred states to find ways to meet the rising demand for power without driving up emissions. Economists have long praised cap-and-trade programs for creating a market in which businesses are responsible for finding the cheapest way to comply with the regulation. *(New York Times)*

Warming and Ocean Acidification Threaten Seafood Industry

The global seafood industry is threatened by climate change and ocean acidification, and reducing carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions is required to safeguard the industry's future, according to a new report from the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and the University of Cambridge. Based on a projected global warming scenario of 2°C due to climate change, the report estimates a total loss of landings to global fisheries by 2050 would range from $17 billion to $41 billion. Some species likely would migrate as temperatures change, which could lead to significant increases in illegal fishing and conflicts between fishing nations, as well as reduced access to marine protein for the 400 million people who depend critically on fish for food. The report discusses how the ocean's chemistry is changing at an unprecedented rate and how ocean acidification—the result of CO_2 uptake from the air—is putting many commercial fish and shellfish species at risk. By 2100, the projected rise in ocean acidity will be at least twice today's levels and will drive a decline in global shellfish production between 2020 and 2060. "This report is a wakeup call for the seafood industry to recognize the scale of the threat to ocean resources from climate change and acidification," said SFP's Blake Lee-Harwood. *(Times-Picayune)*

G-7 Countries Urge Urgent Climate Action

Earlier this month, leaders of the G-7 countries reaffirmed their support to take ambitious, concrete actions to promote low-carbon economies and mitigate climate change. The leaders set out financial, political, and communication approaches needed to address climate change, expressing a "strong determination" to reach an international climate agreement in 2015 and have a successful UN Climate Summit in September. The group will begin mobilizing the UN's Green Climate Fund to finance climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, and reaffirmed its support for committing $100 billion per year to the fund by 2020. The G-7 also declared support for phasing down the production and use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) under the Montreal Protocol, pledging to help quickly deploy safe, climate-friendly alternatives. HFCs are a class of refrigerants up to 13,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide. *(EESI)*

Fungus Damages Central American Coffee Production

Thousands of Central American coffee farmers are fighting a fungus called "coffee rust", which threatens the global supply of smooth-flavored, aromatic Arabica beans. In Guatemala, rising temperatures have warmed the highlands region and allowed rust to thrive, diminishing monthly yields. With no cure for the fungus, and climate conditions expected to encourage its spread, coffee farmers are fighting to survive. Last year, Guatemala declared a national emergency because rust had affected about 70 percent of the nation's crop. In El Salvador, the rate of infection is 74 percent; in Costa Rica, 64; in Nicaragua, 37; and in Honduras, 25. Rust has also hit farms in Southern Mexico, which produces much of the region's shade-grown coffee. The UN says Guatemalan highlands producers have lost, on average, between a third and 60 percent of their income in the last year. The National Coffee Association of Guatemala says 100,000 direct coffee jobs have dried up. The UN is providing emergency food aid to 14,000 Guatemalan households that have lost income due to rust, but that is less than 10 percent of the 160,000 homes estimated to need such help. *(AP)*