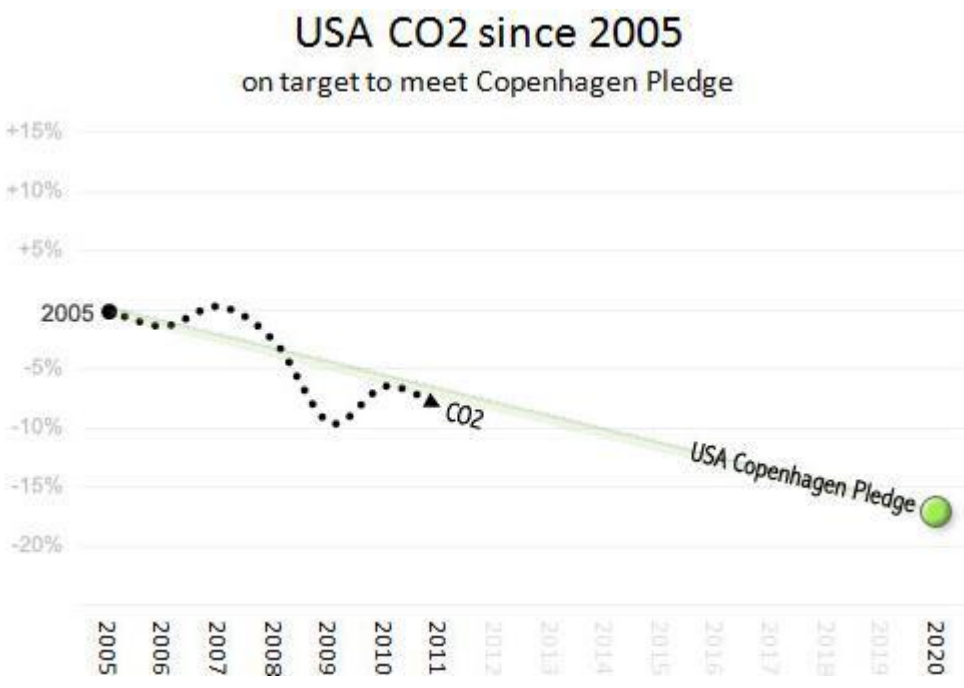




Climate change stunner: USA leads world in CO2 cuts since 2006

Barry Saxifrage | Posted: Jun 4th, 2012

Read More: [Climate Snapshot](#) [Sustainability](#) [carbon emissions](#) [Copenhagen Accord](#) [International Energy Agency](#) [iPhone](#) [James Hansen](#) [NASA scientist](#) [US carbon emissions](#)



The Americans? Really?

Every year the International Energy Agency (IEA) calculates humanity's CO2 pollution from burning fossil fuels. And once again, the overall story line is one of ever-increasing emissions:

"Global carbon-dioxide emissions from fossil-fuel combustion **reached a record high** of 31.6 gigatonnes in 2011."

The world has yet to figure out how to stop the relentless increase in climate pollution. But mixed in with all the bad news there was one shining ray of hope. One of the biggest obstacles to climate action may be shifting. As the IEA highlighted:

"US emissions have now fallen by 430 Mt (7.7%) since 2006, **the largest reduction of all countries or regions**. This development has arisen from lower oil use in the transport sector ... and a substantial shift from coal to gas in the power sector."

How big is a cut of 430 million tonnes of CO2? It's equal to all CO2 from all Canadians outside Alberta. From a US perspective, it's equal to eliminating the combined emissions of ten western states: Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada.

It seems the planet's biggest all-time CO2 polluter is finally reducing its emissions.

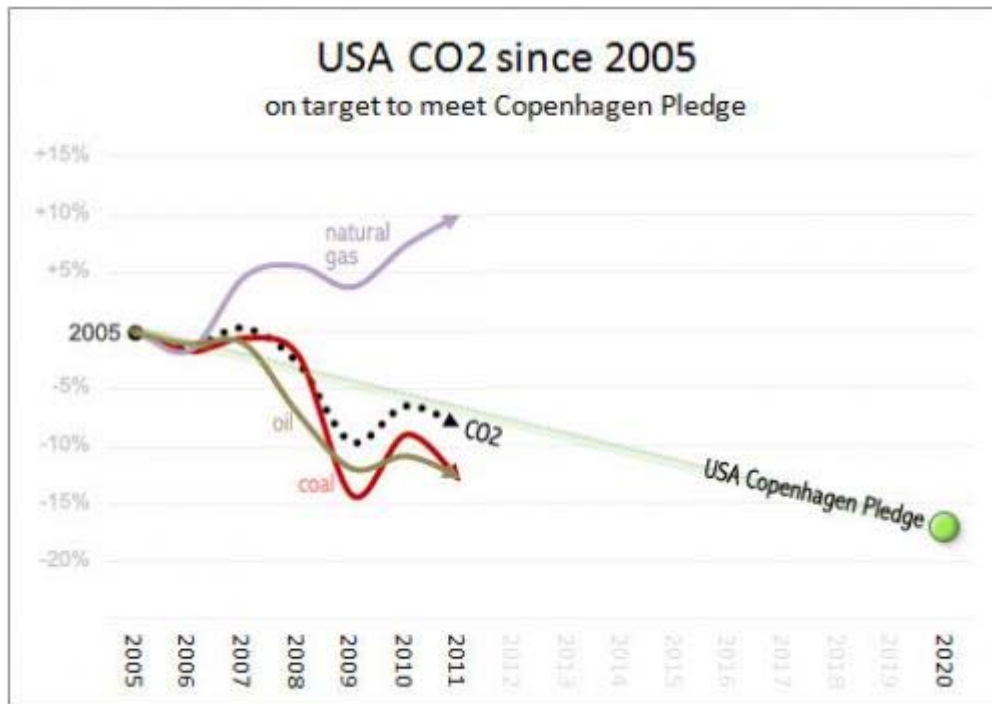
Not only that, but as my top chart shows, US CO2 emissions are falling even *faster* than what President Obama pledged in the global **Copenhagen Accord**.

Breaking the global log jam?

Until now, the failure by the USA to make significant emission cuts has been at the center of the global deadlock over what to do about climate pollution. Many of the biggest polluting nations -- such as China, India, Russia, Canada, Australia, and Brazil -- have been reluctant to create policies to reduce CO2 as long as the biggest bad-boy of them all, the USA, wasn't joining in.

But now, Americans are both promising CO2 cuts and actually doing it. In doing so they are leading the world in total CO2 reductions. Can they keep it up? There are many hopeful signs.

Take a look at my chart below in which I've added USA coal, oil and natural gas data. As the IEA pointed out, it is the plunging use of oil and coal that is driving the decline in CO2.



Data from US EIA April 2012 Monthly Energy Review. Chart by Barry Saxifrage at visualcarbon.org.

Let's take a look at the reasons why oil and coal are declining.

Coal is a "dead man walking"

Coal use in the US plunged 13 percent in the last six years as natural gas and renewables took its place.

Duetsche Bank has called coal use in the US a "dead man walkin'" saying:

"Banks won't finance them. Insurance companies won't insure them. The EPA is coming after them...And the economics to make it clean don't work."

From a climate standpoint, top NASA climate scientist James Hansen is more blunt:

"Coal is the single greatest threat to civilization and all life on our planet. Our global climate is nearing tipping points. Changes are beginning to appear, and there is a potential for explosive changes with effects that would be irreversible"

In the USA, the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign has become a hugely mobilized and successful campaign that has helped stop 150 proposed coal plants and helped retire 110 existing coal plants. Lots of Americans are fed

up with coal pollution, and many are now taking effective action. New York mayor Michael Bloomberg alone gave \$50 million of his own money to the Beyond Coal campaign.

The US EPA just passed new clean air regulations that will cause the oldest, dirtiest and least efficient coal plants to shut down while also making it very hard to build new ones.

Prices for alternatives to coal -- like natural gas, solar and wind -- are falling rapidly. Even the most expensive of these, solar without any subsidies, is now cheaper than building new coal plants in some of the sunniest parts of the US.

Many forces point to a continuing decline in US coal burning.

Oil is pricing itself out of its largest market

The Americans buy more oil than any other nation on earth. But, as I wrote last year, rapidly rising oil prices are driving a big decline in America's oil use. The price of oil has more than doubled since 2005. Double the price of a commodity and people will use less.

Sure enough, the decline in US oil consumption since 2005 has been dramatic. Americans now buy two million fewer barrels of oil every day. That's like shutting off three Keystone-XL-sized pipelines.

But despite buying less oil, the Americans' bill for it rose by \$250 billion a year. That is an extra \$1,000 per adult every year -- for less oil. Ouch.

When it comes to dollars, Americans pay attention. Maybe that is why even the auto makers stood side by side with Obama as he announced regulations forcing cars and light trucks in the USA to improve their miles-per-gallon by 40 per cent this decade. As vehicles become more efficient oil use will fall further.

Since almost all oil in US is used for transportation, the table is set for continuing declines in oil emissions too.

Living in the 1960s

Here is the biggest shocker of all: the average American's CO2 emissions are down to levels not seen since 1964 -- over half a century ago.

Like

757 likes. [Sign Up](#) to see what your friends like.

More in Climate Snapshot



Alberta's oilsands pipelines promise massive non-stop
brand-Canada carbon spills

Climate change results in rainier Vancouver spring

While Harper dithers, provincial CO2 imbalance
problem burns

Climate change giving birth to new cohort of carbon
victims: "Generation Hot"

Global warming increasing by 400,000 atomic bombs
every day

Related Content on the Vancouver Observer

Voters Taking Action on Climate Change photo shoot tackles pipelines and tankers

EARTH MATTERS | Carrie Saxifrage



A huge crowd gathered for the photo shoot for an ad urging Premier Clark to protect the BC coast.

Enbridge oilsands pipeline protested outside Canadian Oil and Gas Export Summit

SUSTAINABILITY | Gisela Gómez



While oil and gas industry experts were speaking at the Canadian Oil and Gas Export Summit at the Four Seasons Hotel, around 40 people outside the building were loudly protesting the proposed...

Climate change giving birth to new cohort of carbon victims: "Generation Hot"

CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



If you're under 30 you've never seen a cooler-than-normal year on Earth. The latest science shows heat is on and lots more is "locked in".

Eat! Vancouver Festival demonstrates the many facets of food and cooking

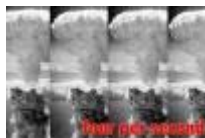
FOOD | Kerry Hall



Big show delivers sensory moments for enthusiasts

Global warming increasing by 400,000 atomic bombs every day

CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



We are hitting an extreme weather tipping point. How much has Canada fueled it? Vancouver? Kitsilano?

Earth Day no deterrent to Canada's drive for more dirty fossil fuels

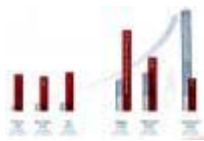
CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



What changes in Canada's climate pollutions have occurred since the first Earth Day 42 years ago?

Metro Vancouver has dirtier transportation than France

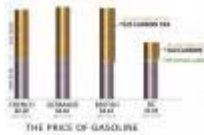
CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



Densely populated Metro Vancouver has dirtier transportation than France. More than density is at play in Canadian high-carbon transportation.

England's "expensive gas" saves money

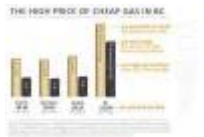
CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



The British, French and Germans tax their gasoline 80 cents more per litre than we do. Are they crazy?

The high cost of BC's cheap gas

CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



British gas costs \$2.13 per liter. Yet British Columbians fork out twice as much to buy gas every year. What's up with that?

Tar sands vs. entire nations

CLIMATE SNAPSHOT | Barry Saxifrage



Which is larger: potential tar sands emissions or all the past emissions from China? From India? From 150 nations combined? New chart says...

[FOLLOW US on Twitter](#)

[BECOME A FAN on Facebook](#)

[SIGN UP for weekly news alerts](#)

(1) Comments

[Add New Comment](#)

King Coal

Kumbayaar June 5th 2012 | 7:19 PM

Last year Australia exported around 350 million tons of coal.

In three years time it is esimated (by the Austcoal Consulting Alliance) that the figure will be 450 million tons.

Canada exports around 30 million tons a year.

According to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, "By 2020, Indonesia's annual production will be above 500 million tons, a more than 50 percent increase from last year's production of 320 million tons."

Once again, Canada is a drop in the proverbial bucket.

By the way; Daniel Veniez has written here many times. Here's an article he published earlier today:

Here's a snip, "Alberta's oil and gas industry supports more than 271,000 direct jobs and hundreds of thousands of indirect jobs in sectors such as construction, manufacturing and financial services, to name a few. It is a massive contributor of Canada's Gross National Product and a source of wealth for

all Canadians. ..."

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/daniel-d-veniez/alberta-oil-sands_b_1568612.html?ref=canada

I Agree (18)

I Disagree (15)