

ENVIRONMENT & TRAVEL

Environmental consciousness rises in the west

By Fabien d'ANGELY & Pauline AUBEY

After years of controversy over the hot issue of global warming, it seems that California – the world's 12th carbon emitter* – is finally ready to move on. The Golden State will put into practice the cut in greenhouse gas emissions recommended by the 1997 Kyoto Treaty (which the USA have yet failed to ratify ever since).

The past few months have proved eventful in California environmental issue-wise. The first green initiative was Governor Schwarzenegger's adoption on 31 August of a law aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions thanks to a system of GHG emissions trading. According to *The Economist*, "[the] new law requires a similar phased reduction in emissions from big industrial polluters starting in 2012. Firms will have to cut their own emissions, or buy the rights to cuts made by other firms"***.

A second remarkable step was achieved on 20 September: the State of California filed an unprecedented "nuisance suit" against six major car makers that had never respected "rules adopted in 2004 requiring carmakers to force cuts in tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks"***. However, this issue is far from settled, as lobbies never hesitate to use any legal weapon to protect their interests (they had until then blocked the 2004 regulation with legal action**); they haven't yet commented on this recent development.

Finally, Schwarzenegger's latest measure consists in the enforcement of the 31 August law through the 27 September Assembly Bill 32, a.k.a. the "California Global Warming Solutions Act". The bill's main purpose is to reduce CO2 emissions to the level of 1990 for 2020 which represents a 25 percent reduction.*

California is not alone on the green path: many US cities have been asserting their support of the Kyoto protocol since the 13 June 2005 "Mayors Climate Protection Agreement." This local initiative to fight global warming was started by Seattle mayor Nickels, and it now seems to have spread across the country. By 6 November 2006, no less than 328 US mayors – representing 55 million US citizens – had officially accepted the challenge****. These encouraging facts show that green initiatives can flourish at the local or state level despite the federal administration's opposition to the Kyoto treaty. What is more, the last elections, resulting in a Democrat majority both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives—together with Schwarzenegger's re-election as Governor of California—might actually herald the dawn of a new environmentally-conscious era. Hopefully more and more people will now be willing to face the "inconvenient truth".

Sources: * "Going deeper green," *The Economist* 1 September 2006.

** "California sues carmakers over global warming" Reuters 20 September 2006.

*** "Office of the Governor of the State of California" www.protectingourevironment.com.

**** "Seattle.gov, Office of the Mayor" <http://www.cityofseattle.net/mayor/climate/>.