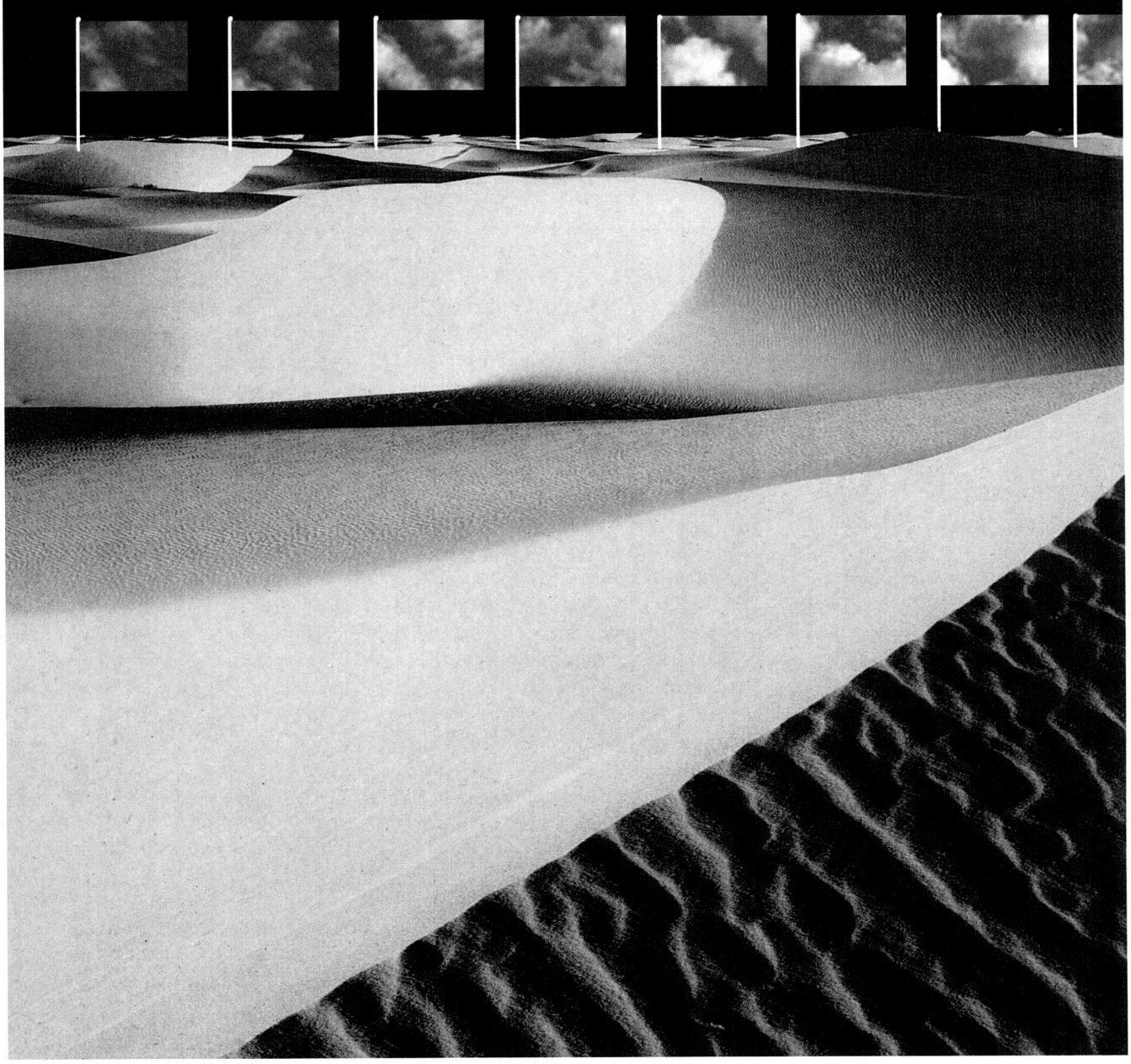
Local Heroics

One size doesn't fit all when it comes to climate policy.
The best chances for cutting emissions lie with communities.

Stephen Hill



WITH KYOTO'S DEADLINES looming, Canada faces the likelihood that we will not reach our targets of reducing emissions to six percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. And Canada is not alone. A number of European countries, Japan and New Zealand are realizing that their emissions continue to rise despite abatement efforts.[1] Kyoto's first commitment period (2008-2012) was supposed to be about industrialized countries accepting responsibility for their historical greenhouse gas emissions and showing leadership in reducing these. Once we move into the second and third commitment periods, so the theory goes, all the countries of the world will accept targets for reducing their greenhouse gases. Unfortunately, something happened on the way to the forum.

The White House – pushed by the certainty that the US Senate would reject any international agreement without China, India and other developing countries – dropped out of Kyoto in early 2001. To keep the Kyoto deal alive, the EU acquiesced to Canadian and Japanese demands for flexibility mechanisms (the same demand that they wouldn't give to Bill Clinton's White House a year earlier) and convinced Canada to commit to the legal text of Kyoto in the fall of 2001. After much gnashing of teeth, Canada ratified Kyoto in the fall of 2002. Finally, with some arm-twisting, the EU managed to bring Russia and its contentious "hot air" onboard in 2004, bringing a full-fledged Kyoto into force on February 16, 2005.[2] Meanwhile, the developing countries (the G77) had declared at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting in New Delhi in 2002 that they would *never* accept binding targets.

In sum, the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases have either rejected Kyoto (the US and Australia), have hollow targets (Russian hot air), have no targets at all (China and India), or have committed to the deal yet struggle to meet their targets (everyone else). Kyoto – as ambitious and important as it is – can be charitably described as a work in progress.

Nonetheless, Kyoto represents a significant achievement in international diplomacy, as the signatures of the 153 ratifying countries may attest. But Kyoto is only a small step on a long journey toward the 50 to 70 percent reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions eventually required. The task ahead is unprecedented and it would be foolish to think that the big solution is just around the corner. No one technology, approach or initiative can possibly be sufficient.

Our challenge now lies in determining where to go from here. Many meetings and discussions are underway to describe what a post-Kyoto climate regime might look like.[3] Canada is hosting the next United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Montreal in November 2005, and Prime Minister Martin has asked the National Roundtable on Environment and Economy to advise Parliament on what Canada's position should be. Given how long it took to get Kyoto off the ground, it's safe to say that no one should hold his or her breath waiting for an international consensus on climate policy. But maybe we need to worry a little less about Kyoto and keep our eye on the real task at hand - namely, learning how best to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Shifting the emphasis

We need to dramatically ramp up our search for innovations that allow individuals, communities, companies, institutions, states, provinces and nations to reduce greenhouse gases – wherever, whenever and however they can. Rather than remaining preoccupied with the symbolic commitments of governments at international meetings like Kyoto, let's equip ourselves with a toolbox of examples, tactics, strategies and actions for reducing greenhouse gases at every possible opportunity.

We can connect climate change with local issues by demonstrating that actions to reduce greenhouse gases will reduce climate risk and provide multiple benefits in other areas.

Technology does not appear to be the biggest barrier to action. Canadian energy analyst Ralph Torrie has produced an analysis showing Canada already has the technological wherewithal to reduce emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and in doing so find *annual savings of $30 billion!*[4] And yet, our emissions continue to rise. Plainly, technical ingenuity abounds. What we need are tools to overcome the implementation gap – tools that will help us understand the barriers to action and devise strategies to overcome these barriers.

Strategies and policies that reduce greenhouse gases will emerge from a diversity of places for a multiplicity of reasons. This diversity is welcome because local realities provide the context for making sense of climate risk.

Four categories of policy tools are particularly important for overcoming the implementation gap (see "Policy Tools, p. 30). These tools make sense even in the absence of an international framework like Kyoto. In other words, we can get started now.

Communication

Climate change is sufficiently complex that average citizens could be forgiven for ignoring it in their day-to-day lives. Scant communication efforts by government, industry, public institutions and the media about climate risk (not to mention the concerted lobby for policy lethargy by some industry voices) do little to bring climate change to the forefront of the Canadian imagination.[5] Even the centrepiece of Canada's climate communication efforts, Rick Mercer and the One-Tonne Challenge, seems to be falling on deaf ears

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because Canadians simply don't know enough about climate change to care. Recent focus groups on the One-Tonne Challenge concluded that people could not "articulate what the challenge is about or why it is important. They had no understanding of why they would want to participate or even what a tonne is."[6]

Where governments have failed to effectively communicate about climate change, industry and non-governmental organizations have filled the void – at times with misinformation intended to cast doubts upon the robust scientific consensus and to stir fears of economic doomsday for any climate policy that goes beyond voluntary efforts.

The first job at hand is to get serious about the money and effort required to communicate effectively with the public about climate change. We need a robust and meaningful discussion about the risks of climate change and the costs of action, whatever each may be. Communication will need to come from many sources (scientists, politicians, artists/musicians, industry leaders), through many venues (person-to-person, electronic, media/publicity, print materials, advertisements, philanthropic efforts), and to a variety of audiences.[7] Communication will need to be two-way, so that the public can speak with experts and decision makers.[8]

Reframing the climate issue

In order to change attitudes toward climate policy, it will be necessary to reframe these policies so that they align with local priorities. If the costs – broadly defined – of reducing greenhouse gases are perceived to be too high, few people will support new measures regardless of how seriously they view climate risk. We must find the sales pitches that will convince people to change their behaviour (or accept policies that will change behaviour) from business as usual.

Fortunately, economists tell us that "no-regrets" actions – those that we should take even absent the risk of climate change – are common in climate policy. Public health professionals know the ancillary benefits of cleaner air. Municipalities strive to create more livable communities with abundant public transit and vibrant urban cores. Business strategists increasingly think that competitive advantages accrue to those who address environmental concerns. Engineers describe the myriad financial benefits of energy efficiency, while nations and regions are recognizing that decentralized energy systems can be cheaper and more secure. The common thread here is the attempt to connect climate change with a local issue by demonstrating that actions to reduce greenhouse gases will not only reduce climate risk (something most people now agree to be worthwhile) but also provide multiple benefits in other ways.

Building partnerships and collaboration

Greenhouse gas reduction needn't be left to national governments and their multilateral agreements: Any organization or individual can participate in a group

Policy Tools to Empower Local Action

Communicate
- Create public and online forums for discussing the nature of climate risk and possible solutions
- Involve a diversity of perspectives (science, ethics, politics, economics, First Nations)
- Be proactive, consistent and frequent

Change market incentives
- Emissions trading schemes
- Carbon taxes
- Remove fossil fuel subsidies
- Renewable portfolio standards
- Energy conservation subsidies
- Emissions inventories and carbon disclosure initiatives
- Eco-labels
- Voluntary offset programs

Reframe the solution to change attitudes
- connect with local realities
- link with other immediate priorities
- emphasize the positive
- see "Shifting Priorities," p. 31 for some examples

Build partnerships and networks
- Clean Development Mechanism
- The Climate Group
- Climate Change Central
- Subnational political agreements
- Institutional agreements
- Pew Center's Business Environmental Leadership Council
- Community

Climate change is a global problem, but we needn't wait for global solutions. Many smaller-scale local approaches will be required. Luckily the tools for engaging community concern and commitment to act are already at our fingertips.

What we need are tools that will help us devise strategies to overcome the barriers to action.

effort to reduce greenhouse gases, on any number of levels and for any number of reasons. In fact, the most effective partnerships may be those that benefit each party in different ways. I might agree to car pool with my neighbour because I am concerned about climate risk while she might simply want to save some money on parking. Or a company might agree to offset its emissions by developing a renewable energy project in a developing country, as the Clean Development Mechanism of Kyoto allows. (Kyoto's Clean Development Mechanism, which supports sustainable development and greenhouse gas reductions, offers an important opportunity to build trust in climate policy and provide meaningful and locally controlled development.)

Partnerships can also be formed between cities or states and provinces, as has recently happened in the US. On June 13, 2005, the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement was passed by the US Conference of Mayors, an organization to which 1183 US cities with populations greater than 30,000 belong. To date, 188 mayors have signed on, committing to meet or beat Kyoto targets in their cities. And on the West Coast, the governors of California, Oregon and Washington have formed their own West Coast Governors' Climate Initiative.

Major public and private sector emitters – who are unable to sign or reject Kyoto – could form a coalition of leaders in greenhouse gas reductions to share experiences, pitfalls and best practices. Some enlightened industrial emitters could even band together to lobby the government for *more* aggressive action on climate change. The Prince of Wales' Business & the Environment Programme did just that in the UK recently, calling upon Tony Blair – a known political champion of climate action – to do even more.[9] In its letter to the Prime Minister, the group of CEOs and senior executives recognized investment in a low-carbon future as a "strategic business objective". They asked the government to take steps to address the "Catch 22" situation the private and public sectors find themselves in with respect to climate policy, "in which governments feel limited in their ability to introduce new climate change policy because they fear business resistance, while companies are unable to scale up investment in low-carbon solutions because of the absence of long-term policies." In Canada, the Clean Air Renewable Energy Coalition includes major corporations, five environmental organizations as well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. They form a partnership with different but overlapping objectives that has successfully lobbied the federal government for more incentives for renewable energy.

Partnership and collaboration will also be needed for sharing knowledge and stimulating social learning about climate policy. A vast literature points to the role of social networks in creating pressure for encouraging environmentally desirable behaviour.[10] Whatever form this collaboration takes, it is sure that greenhouse gas reductions, when they occur, will reflect the *local* cultural and social understanding of climate risk and possible policy solutions.

Changing market incentives

The climate is an enormously undervalued global resource. Any initiative that attempts to make the market work for the climate by internalizing the cost of greenhouse gases will serve to reduce these emissions. There are so many options available to governments,

Shifting Priorities

Old framing	New Framing
Climate policies damage the economy.	Renewable energy and energy conservation help develop and diversify local economies. Money that would otherwise leave the region to buy fossil fuels now stays within local economy.
Climate policies will lead to job losses.	Renewable energy and energy conservation are new industries that will create highly paying local jobs.
Business will suffer from additional energy costs.	New policies will drive costs down through energy efficiency and process/product innovation. Firms will better compete on international markets.
Climate change and local air quality are separate issues.	Improving local air quality improves public health, reduces health care costs, and addresses climate change.
Reliable energy supply is central to our national well being.	Energy security and reliability increase with conservation and decentralized production through a number of locally renewable energy sources.
"The government wants to tax my SUV."	Walking and biking improve fitness, help us lose weight and save money.
Automobiles and roads are integral to our economy and lifestyles.	Livable communities are those with abundant public transit and pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods.

corporations[11] and institutions: emissions trading schemes, renewable portfolio standards, product efficiency standards, renewable energy and conservation subsidies, eco-labelling schemes, mandatory and voluntary greenhouse gas reporting schemes, offset programs, and research and development funding. In addition, pressures from private investors (e.g., the Carbon Disclosure Project), insurers, and consumers (e.g., Green Tag programs) are morphing climate change into a full-fledged business issue. Conspicuously absent from this list of market mechanisms, yet urgently needed, is the reduction of government subsidies to the fossil fuel sector.

The emergence of fiscal measures such as emissions trading and carbon taxes (in practice in Europe and soon in Canada) represents an important signpost to the market that greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced. As this market matures, actions will quickly follow.

The need for these market signals cannot be overstated: There are trillions of dollars in new energy infrastructure needed over the next two decades to satisfy the world's growing energy needs. The right incentives and market signals can set the stage for enormous change toward a low-carbon economy.

Time to get started

The enormity of climate change can often lead us to think that only a global solution will work. Indeed, we often seem to be waiting for the next big thing: a technological fix like fuel cells, hybrid vehicles, renewable energy or clean coal; or a global policy framework like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol or whatever comes after Kyoto. But in the continued absence of the "big fix", a multiplicity of policy approaches, agreements and actions from a variety of individual, institutional, corporate, non-profit and government actors makes the most sense.

Kyoto will remain important to climate policy – but it may eventually outlive its useful purpose. It may be replaced – or complemented – by a series of smaller partnerships and networks on climate change at regional (e.g., NAFTA), national (e.g., bilateral agreements between Canada and the US or between Japan and China), subnational and sectoral levels.

While progress on international climate agreements might be slow, action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions need not be. Locally relevant and acceptable approaches to reducing greenhouse gases will hopefully continue to emerge throughout the world, sometimes motivated by reasons other than climate change.

The decentralized approach to climate policy recognizes that policy choices and actions should reflect local realities. A toolbox of policy tools and options will increase the likelihood that individuals, communities, organizations and governments find the reasons and means to reduce their greenhouse gases. It's time to get started!

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Notes

[1] *See BBC News, "UK Could Miss Kyoto Targets (April 1, 2005) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4399323.stm>; and "New Zealand's Climate Change Challenge Increases," **The New Zealand Herald** (June 17, 2005).*

[2] *Severe economic troubles and industrial collapse in Russia and Ukraine – rather than purposeful actions to reduce greenhouse gases – dragged emissions below 1990 levels likely providing a surplus of emission credits that could be sold to other countries, known as hot air.*

[3] *One of the more prominent international efforts is being led by the Pew Center on Global Climate Change: "Beyond Kyoto" <www.pewclimate.org>.*

[4] *R. Torrie, "Kyoto and Beyond: The Low Emission Path to Innovation and Efficiency," was prepared for the David Suzuki Foundation and the Canadian Climate Action Network Canada by Ralph Torrie, Richard Parfett and Paul Steenhof of Torrie Smith Associates. October 2002. Available at <www.davidsuzuki.org/files/Kyoto_72.pdf>.*

[5] *For two seminal overviews on this lobbying, readers are referred to "The Carbon Wars" by Jeremy Leggett <www.carbonwar.co.uk>; and "The Heat is On" by Ross Gelspan <www.heatisonline.org>.*

[6] *Bill Curry, 2005. "The Challenge No One Understands," **The Globe and Mail**, (July 7, 2005), pg. A4.*

[7] *For a more extensive list, see "Environmental Communications" in Dixon Thompson, "Tools for Environmental Management" (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002), pp. 326-28.*

[8] *One interesting and helpful example is <www.realclimate.org>, a web log (or blog) created by a small group of leading climate scientists in 2004 dedicated to providing context to mainstream media reports on science and, hopefully, addressing climate science misunderstanding and disinformation.*

[9] *To see the May 27, 2005 press release, go to <www.cpi.cam.ac.uk/bep/downloads/CLG_pressrelease_letter.pdf>.*

[10] *For an excellent overview of this literature, see Gerald T. Gardner and Paul C. Stern, "Environmental Problems and Human Behavior" (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2002).*

[11] *For one recent corporate example, GE announced on May 9, 2005 a doubling of its investment in environmentally preferable technology (to 1.5 billion per year) under the Ecoimagination brand. They hope this investment will generate 20 billion dollars in annual revenue by 2020. See <http://ge.ecomagination.com> for more information.*

The Climate Group is assembling case studies of leading greenhouse gas reducers: **www.theclimategroup.org**

For a series of very good efforts to reframe climate action in a positive way, see the Pembina Institute sponsored website **www.climatechangesolutions.com**

Canada's 2005 climate change policy, Moving Forward on Climate Change: A Plan for Honouring our Kyoto Commitment, contains measures for reducing emissions as well as frameworks for an emissions trading program between large industrial emitters and the government-funded purchase of emissions reductions through the climate fund. There are few commentators who feel the plan as it stands (and at current levels of funding) will allow Canada to meet our Kyoto target. See **www.climatechange.gc.ca**

Clean Air Renewable Energy Coalition is a group of corporate, environmental non-governmental organizations and municipal governments who argue against the market barriers for low-impact renewable energy in Canada and recommend seven government policies to advance renewable energy: **http://cleanairrenewableenergycoalition.com**

For more information about the US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, see **www.seattle.gov/mayor/climate**

More about the West Coast Governors' Initiative formed by California, Oregon and Washington in November 2004 can be found at **www.ef.org/westcoastclimate**