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**U.S. formally exits Paris pact aiming to curb climate change**

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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After helping to forge the global pact five years ago, the United States on November 4 formally left the Paris Agreement. The accord was made to prevent the threat of catastrophic climate change.

Most of the countries in the world have committed to the Paris Agreement, which calls for them to report on their efforts to make changes for the sake of the environment.

**What is a greenhouse gas and how are most greenhouse gasses released?**

Most greenhouse gases are released by the burning of fossil fuels. This includes for heating, cooking, electrical generation, transportation and manufacturing. A growing body of scientists has called upon governments, industries and citizens to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases.

U.S. President Donald Trump had long threatened to leave the agreement. His administration gave notice in 2017. The move further isolates Washington D.C. in the world but has no immediate impact on international efforts to curb global warming.

Still, the United Nations (U.N.) agency that oversees the treaty and France, the host of the 2015 Paris talks, joined three other countries to issue a statement. They expressed concern about the U.S. withdrawal.

**Why are our European allies concerned about the US’s withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement?**

"There is no greater responsibility than protecting our planet and people from the threat of climate change," the statement said. "The science is clear that we must urgently scale up action and work together to reduce the impacts of global warming and to ensure a greener, more resilient future for us all. The Paris Agreement provides the right framework to achieve this."

**Rising Temperatures Could Do a Lot of Harm**

"We remain committed to working with all U.S. stakeholders and partners around the world to accelerate climate action" and with the countries involved to implement the Paris Agreement, they said.

The next round of U.N. climate talks is set for Glasgow, Scotland, in 2021. At present, 189 countries have approved the accord, which aims to keep the increase in average temperatures worldwide "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), ideally no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), compared to pre-industrial levels. The industrial era began in the mid-1800s.

A further six countries have signed, but have not formally approved the pact.

Scientists say that any rise beyond 2 degrees Celsius could have a devastating impact on large parts of the world. It could raise sea levels, stoke tropical storms and worsen droughts and floods.

The world has already warmed 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial time. So the efforts are really about preventing another 0.3 to 0.7 degrees Celsius (0.5 to 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming.

"Having the U.S. pull out of Paris is likely to reduce efforts to mitigate, and therefore increase the number of people who are put into a life-or-death situation because of the impacts of climate change: This is clear from the science," said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, a co-author of U.N. science reports on global warming. Cornell University is in New York.

**U.S. And China Make the Most Emissions**

The Paris accord allows countries to set their own voluntary targets for reducing greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and to increase those goals every few years.

In the agreement's only binding requirement, nations have to accurately report on their efforts.

"The beauty of this system is that nobody can claim they were bullied into some sort of plan," said Nigel Purvis, a former U.S. climate negotiator in the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. "They're not negotiated. They're accepted."

**How are greenhouse gasses removed from the atmosphere?**

The United States is the world's second-biggest emitter after China of heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide. Its contribution to cutting emissions is seen as important, but it's not alone in the effort. In recent weeks, China, Japan and South Korea have joined the European Union (EU) and several other countries in setting national deadlines to stop pumping more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than can be removed from the air with trees and other methods. The EU includes 27 countries in Europe.

Joe Biden won against President Trump in this year's election. He has said he favors signing the U.S. back up to the Paris accord. Because it was set up as an executive agreement, not a treaty, congressional approval is not required, Purvis said.

White House spokesman Judd Deere said the accord limits economies and "has done nothing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

**U.S. Withdrawal Garners Criticism**

If the U.S. continues to remain outside the pact, it's likely that other countries will try to impose tariffs on U.S. imports, paving the way for trade wars. A trade war happens when one country retaliates against another by putting restrictions on the other country's imports.

The EU is debating proposals known as the EU New Green Deal. They would include a so-called carbon border adjustment. The proposals are aimed at preventing companies from dodging emissions reduction efforts in the EU by manufacturing goods in places without strict measures.

**What is climate neutrality?**

Germany, which now holds the EU's presidency, said it was important for Europe to lead by example now that the United States had left the pact. German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said on November 4 that the EU aims to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. Climate neutrality comes when carbon emissions are reduced and remaining emissions are offset with climate protection measures.

Mahowald said she worries that with the U.S. out, China and other nations may decide they don't have to do as much to cut carbon pollution. China initially agreed to curb emissions in a two-nation agreement with the United States when Barack Obama was president.

The Trump administration has shunned measures to cut emissions. However, Seibert said that U.S. states, cities and businesses have pressed ahead with their own efforts.

In addition to condemnation from abroad, environmental and public health groups in the United States criticized the November 4 withdrawal.

**Please respond:**

* **Using evidence form this text, explain how rising temperatures could cause harm.**
* **According to this article, why did U.S. President Donald Trump leave the Paris Agreement?**
* **What should the United States position be on participating in the Paris climate agreement? Explain your position.**