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# Airlines vow to halve carbon emissions by 2050

**Exclusive:** Industry will offer cut at climate change summit to avoid tougher action

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Dan Milmo, transport correspondent  
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Airlines, airports and aircraft companies to agree to cut 50% below 2005 levels by 2050.  
Photograph: Corbis

The aviation industry will tomorrow make a dramatic pledge to slash carbon dioxide emissions in half by 2050 in a move that will force up air fares and spark a green technology race among aircraft manufacturers.

The [British Airways](#) chief executive, Willie Walsh, will unveil an agreement between airlines, airports and aircraft companies to cut emissions to 50% below 2005 levels by 2050. In a bid to seize the initiative from environmental groups clamouring for higher taxes on the industry, the plan will be presented to world leaders at the United Nations forum on [climate change](#) in New York.

Airlines have been accused of dragging their heels over climate change, but the strategic shift reflects industry concerns that it could be ambushed at the global warming summit in Copenhagen in December if it does not address its growing emissions.

Writing in the Guardian, [climate change secretary Ed Miliband says he is haunted by the possibility that politicians will fail to reach a global climate deal](#). Calling for a new urgency and spirit of co-operation in the negotiations, he writes: "The fate of every nation on earth hangs on the outcome of Copenhagen. It is too important to play the cards-close-to-your-chest poker games that marked diplomacy of the twentieth century."

UN officials are hoping that China's president, Hu Jintao, may break the deadlock in the negotiations by announcing in New York ambitious plans to reduce China's [carbon emissions](#).

If Walsh's proposals are accepted by the UN, they will be on the agenda at Copenhagen, where world leaders hope to agree global emissions reduction targets. The pledges drawn up by members of the global airline body, the International [Air Transport](#)

Association, are:

- To reduce net carbon dioxide emissions by 50% by 2050, compared with 2005 levels.
- To make all industry growth carbon-neutral by 2020.
- To cut carbon dioxide emissions by 1.5% per year over the next decade.
- To submit plans for joining a global carbon trading scheme to the UN by November 2010.

The 50% reduction target by 2050 goes further than the UK government's target of limiting airline emissions to 2005 levels by the same deadline. Walsh's presentation to UN delegates on behalf of IATA will be viewed by climate change campaigners as an attempt to pre-empt punitive measures at Copenhagen, amid fears among airline executives that the aviation industry will be singled out over its exclusion from carbon dioxide caps enshrined in the 1997 Kyoto protocols.

Walsh will say: "International aviation emissions were not included in the Kyoto protocol 12 years ago. Now we have a chance to rectify that omission, and we must seize it. Our proposals represent the most environmentally effective and practical means of reducing aviation's carbon impact. They are the best option for the planet and we urge the UN to adopt them."

Under the proposals, airlines would leave the EU emissions trading scheme, which they are due to join in 2012, and would buy carbon dioxide permits in a global market. Walsh warned earlier this year that a global scheme would add around £3bn per year to industry costs, which would be passed on to passengers through higher fares. According to the European commission, the EU trading scheme will add €9 (£8.16) to the cost of a return short-haul flight and €40 to a long-distance return flight. However, campaigners suggested the new pledge was undermined by its reliance on the industry funding emissions cuts elsewhere. "It is a real problem that this will include offsetting and buying carbon credits," said John Sauven, director of Greenpeace. "It shows that Willie Walsh is not really taking the issue of climate change seriously."

Aviation accounts for 1.6% of global greenhouse emissions currently, but will become the biggest emitter in the developed world if it grows unchecked. The government's advisory body, the committee on climate change, warned ministers this month that aviation will account for a quarter of all emissions in the developed world even if it caps 2050 emissions at 2005 levels.

The committee also recommended state investment in the green technology. Cutting the industry's emissions will require radical advances in technology that, if they are not achieved, would force airlines to make up the difference on carbon trading or offset markets. Airlines are expected to lose \$11bn (£6.8bn) this year, according to IATA, and their weak balance sheets will be strained further by carbon permits, analysts say.

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