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US 'ready for emissions targets'

Julian Borger, diplomatic editor
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The US is willing to enter a binding international agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions by this summer, if China and India agree to match the commitment, a White House official said yesterday.

James Connaughton, the chairman of the White House's Council on Environmental Quality, said the presumption that the US was only interested in setting voluntary emissions targets was "a myth".

"We are prepared to join in a binding international agreement, if that agreement includes the major economies including major developing economies," Connaughton told the Guardian in an interview during a visit to London.

He argued that the US was actually ahead of Europe in setting mandatory goals for sectors such as fuel economy, lighting efficiency and renewable fuel technology, and would consider a binding target for the US economy as a whole.

"It is highly likely we will establish an economy-wide goal. But we are not dogmatic here. If China and India want to do a series of goals that cover most of our emissions, that's acceptable," he said.

He said work on agreeing on a common target would take place at a meeting in Paris in April of representatives of the world's 17 biggest economies. The agreement would then be formalised around this July's G8 meeting in Japan.

European officials said Connaughton's announcement was an important shift in language from Washington, but insisted that the industrialised world should take the lead in tackling global warming.

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