Fixing Climate Overshoot Means Deep, Immediate Emissions Curbs, UN Warns

Action also needs to be "rapid and sustained" to limit warming and eventually return to 1.5C

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Not only is the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C now unachievable, the task of minimizing the overshoot beyond that threshold requires fast, deep and sustained cuts to emissions, according to the UN.

The latest emissions gap report from the UN Environment Program lays out a sobering assessment for policymakers ahead of next month's COP31 summit.

Limiting overshoot needs major emissions curbs

By John Ainger

The world can no longer keep global warming below 1.5C and must now focus on minimizing its overshoot, the United Nations said ahead of next month's COP31 climate talks in Turkey. The US retreat from the fight is making it even harder.

Countries will have to cut CO2 emissions by nearly a fifth by the end of the decade compared to 2025 levels to achieve the "lowest possible" overshoot, the UN Environment Program said in its annual emissions gap report, published on Wednesday.

The UNEP defined that scenario as limiting temperatures to 1.7C to 1.8C above pre-industrial levels and returning global mean warming to 1.5C by the end of the century. It described the necessary emissions reductions as "immediate, deep, rapid and sustained."

The report sets out potential paths forward after the UN first reported last month that exceeding the 1.5C threshold envisaged by the Paris Agreement in 2015 is now virtually guaranteed.

US Sees Emissions Surge as Trump Steps Away from Climate

Each fraction of a degree of warming above pre-industrial levels raises the risk of extreme weather events, harm to global food production and rapid inflation.

The US exit from the Paris Agreement has been particularly damaging to global climate efforts. While the UNEP report found that collective G20 emissions growth slowed last year, America's emissions increase of 133 megatons of CO2 "far exceeded" that of any other country. COP31 host Turkey was second, with an increase of 24.4 megatons.

A US climate target announced in the final weeks of the Biden administration, which was projected to cut emissions by one gigaton by 2030, has now been omitted from the UNEP's calculations. One gigaton is equivalent to a year's output from the country's entire vehicle fleet.

While global greenhouse gas emissions last year were similar to 2024 levels, "it is too soon to conclude that global emissions are plateauing or peaking," the report said. Those resulting from the use of fossil fuels climbed, but were offset by a decrease in emissions from land use and forestry.

Global leaders and climate negotiators are set to meet for COP31 in the Turkish city of Antalya in early November to discuss how to combat warming and adapt to its impacts.

Heat projection

2.6C (AA note: And just +2.0C will be disastrous)

The expected level of warming by 2100 if nations deliver on current climate policies and continue similar efforts, according to UNEP.

Action needed

"Overshoot is not surrender. We can still keep it as small and as short as possible and bring temperatures back below 1.5C before the end of the century."

Antonio Guterres UN Secretary-General

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