

Robert Redford Co-Hosts US Mayors at Global Warming Conference

By Mike O'Sullivan
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More than 30 U.S. mayors say they are making progress in the fight against global warming.

The so-called Sundance Summit was held at Redford's rustic Sundance Preserve, and was co-sponsored by the actor, Salt Lake City mayor Rocky Anderson, and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, an association of local governments that is working to improve the environment.

The mayors met with scientists and industry experts to look for ways of curbing greenhouse gases, which include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. The gases are produced both naturally and through human activity, but humans are blamed for the large-scale emissions that most experts view as a cause of global warming.



Robert Redford

Redford has been involved in environmental issues since the 1960s, and in 1989 hosted U.S. and Soviet scientists at a conference on climate change.

"Both scientific communities agreed it had already reached a catastrophic point," he said. "Something had to be done immediately and the word had to get out."

He says the outcome of that conference was disappointing. No one listened.

Over the years, that has changed, and Redford says the so-called green movement has expanded to include policy makers and corporate executives. He is now working with cities, which he says are good places to start any environmental program.

"It had to come from communities," he added. "It had to come from state and local governments. It had to come from governors and mayors. And mayors are the officials that are closest to the people they represent."

This year's conference drew mayors from Des Moines, Minneapolis, Annapolis and Austin, and cities in more than 20 U.S. states.

Michelle Wyman of the International Council says the mayors come from across the political spectrum, but share the common goals of improving the lives of their citizens, and saving money. She says U.S. mayors are now reporting progress in cutting emissions of carbon dioxide or CO₂, a major culprit in global warming.

"By way of example, in 2005, 164 local governments reduced 23 million tons [21 million metric tons] of CO₂, for a cost savings back to local budgets of \$600 million," he noted.

The United States is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and U.S. officials have been criticized for failing to cut emissions further. Bush administration officials say they recognize the problem and have plans in place to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 500 million metric tons by 2012. That is equivalent, they say, to taking 70 million cars off the road.

Redford and other critics say it is not enough, and he says he will work with local officials to get more done. Michelle Wyman says local communities are leading the U.S. drive to curb greenhouse gas emissions, and that cities in other countries are leading the effort elsewhere.

"There is action directly addressing climate protection going on in South Africa, in India, in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Latin America, specifically Argentina and Brazil, and Europe," he added.

The most sweeping action to cut carbon emissions in the United States took place this year at the state level, when California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a law to curb emissions by 25 percent by 2020.

Wyman cites several local communities as leaders in the effort, and says they are taking advantage of new environmentally friendly technology. She says Alameda County, outside San Francisco, is making progress in part by using solar power. She adds that Anchorage, Alaska has installed a methane capture system at a local landfill, and is using the gas formed by decomposing waste to generate electric power.