

Top polluting cities revealed as activists fume at COP29 fossil fuel lobby

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Climate activists protest during the COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, on November 15, 2024 [Anatoly Maltsev/EPA-EFE]

Baku, November 15 (RHC)-- Cities in Asia and the United States emit the most heat-trapping gases that feed climate change, according to new data, as delegates at United Nations climate talks decide how much rich nations will pay to help the world cut emissions.

According to Climate Trace's annual data released on Friday at the Conference of Parties, or COP29, in Baku, Azerbaijan, seven states or provinces spewed more than 1 billion metric tonnes of greenhouse gases, all of them in China except the US state of Texas, which ranks sixth. Shanghai topped the list, producing 256 million metric tonnes.

The organization, cofounded by former US Vice President Al Gore, also found that China, India, Iran, Indonesia and Russia had the biggest increases in emissions from 2022 to 2023 while Venezuela, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and the US had the biggest decreases in pollution.

The release of the data comes as climate officials and activists alike are growing increasingly frustrated over the world's inability to clamp down on planet-warming fossil fuels as well as the countries and companies that promote them.

On Friday, oil executives, including from Total, BP, Equinor and Shell, appeared at the summit and said they would invest \$500m to expand access to sustainable modern energy and help people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, to transition to clean cooking practices.

But the sizeable presence of fossil fuel industry lobbyists at the meeting angered environmental groups and activists.

Bianca Castro, a climate activist from Portugal, also expressed her frustration, telling The Associated Press news agency that many groups are "losing hope in the process." The success of this year's climate summit hinges on whether countries can agree on a new finance target for richer countries, development lenders and the private sector to deliver at least \$1 trillion each year to help developing countries cope with the rapidly changing climate.

A report by an independent panel of experts at the summit said countries need to invest more than \$6 trillion per year by 2030 or risk having to pay more in the future. But reaching a deal could be tough at the summit, where the mood has been soured by public disagreements and pessimism about shifts in global politics.

On Thursday, Argentina announced that it was withdrawing its delegation. And the presence of oil, gas and coal interests at the talks has also long been a source of controversy.

The two most recent COPs have been held in energy-rich countries. Last year's was in the United Arab Emirates. The 2024 host, Azerbaijan, launched a defence of planet-heating fossil fuels with President Ilham Aliyev on Tuesday repeating his insistence that oil, gas and other natural resources are a "gift from God".

"It's unfortunate that the fossil fuel industry and the petrostates have seized control of the COP process to an unhealthy degree," Gore said on Thursday.

On Friday, activists from the Kick the Big Polluters Out (KBPO) coalition noted that Japan, for instance, brought employees of coal giant Sumitomo as part of its delegation, Canada included oil producers Suncor and Tourmaline, and Italy brought employees of energy giants Eni and Enel.

KBPO said the official attendance list of the talks featured more than 1,770 fossil fuel lobbyists.

A group of leading climate activists and scientists also warned on Friday that the "global climate process has been captured and is no longer fit for purpose". A letter signed by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former UN climate chief Christina Figueres and leading climate scientists called for "an urgent

overhaul” of the climate talks.

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