



Switzerland and the Environment

Climate Change Policy

There has been a one degree increase in temperature in the higher mountain regions in Europe over the last few decades. In Switzerland, a one degree Celsius increase would reduce snow fall on the slopes by 10 percent and, in the Alps, the years 1994, 2000, 2002, and 2003 were the warmest in the past 500 years. If this trend continues, as research predicts, Switzerland may suffer from landslides, floods, a decrease in winter tourism, and a negative effect on agriculture

On the other hand, the Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe ranked Switzerland 13th out of 57 countries in their 2011 Climate Change Performance Index. The index, which was presented at the climate conference in Cancun, Mexico in 2010, measures climate protection performance of the 57 nations that are responsible for over 90 percent of CO₂ emissions in the world.

Kyoto Protocol

The Swiss parliament ratified the Kyoto Protocol on climate change in 2003, which aims to combat global warming by reducing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. Switzerland was the 111th country to ratify the protocol. Between 2008 and 2012, industrialized countries agreed to reduce their emissions by 5.2 percent of 1990 levels. Switzerland and the EU have pledged to reduce their emissions by 8 percent. To reach this goal, Switzerland passed the CO₂ act that sets the goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by 10 percent of 1990 levels by 2010.

Emissions Trading and the CO₂ Act

In order to meet the 8 percent target set by the Kyoto Protocol, Switzerland must reduce its CO₂ emissions by 48.52 million metric tons. Emissions trading creates an incentive to reach this target by permitting any excess allowances of CO₂ to be sold in Switzerland's developing CO₂ market, the international market, or carried over after 2012. Therefore, companies that sign the legally binding commitment to reduce their CO₂ emissions by a pre-determined target have the incentive to reduce emissions below this target in order to sell their extra CO₂ allowances. On the other hand, if a company emits excess emissions, it must buy CO₂ allowances in the domestic or international market or earn allowances from emissions reduction projects abroad.

As an added incentive, countries that participate in emissions trading are exempt from the CO2 tax. If a participating company fails to comply with its reduction agreement, however, that company will be forced to pay the CO2 tax for every metric ton of CO2 emitted since becoming exempt. Switzerland is also considering joining the EU trading scheme, but this will only be possible if there is a functioning CO2 market created through a sufficiently high CO2 tax.

Climate Cent Foundation

According to their website, “the Climate Cent Foundation is a voluntary measure of Swiss industry aimed at efficient climate protection.” The foundation is committed, vis-à-vis the Swiss Confederation, to reducing CO2 emissions by 12 million metric tons between 2008 and 2012, including at least 2 million metric tons in Switzerland (The Kyoto Protocol target for Switzerland is 48.52 million metric tons by 2012). The foundation is funded by charging 1.5 cent per liter of imported diesel and petrol, which is then invested into projects that reduce greenhouse gas emission in Switzerland and abroad. In Switzerland, emissions can be reduced in the transportation sector as well as buildings and the industrial sector. Projects abroad are approved by the UN accreditation body and are awarded tradable certificates, which Switzerland can claim to meet its reduction target.

For a complete list of Swiss climate change policies and measures [click here](#) to view the International Energy Agency database.

Nuclear Energy

Following the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, Swiss citizens participated in the largest antinuclear protests ever seen in Switzerland. In Switzerland, 40 percent of electricity is provided with 5 nuclear reactors. The tragedy in Japan has convinced the Swiss government that the risk of nuclear power is too great and this high risk also increases the cost of nuclear energy. Therefore, Switzerland has reversed its nuclear policy and will phase out the use of nuclear power plants over the next 2 to 3 decades. The first reactor will be shut down in 2019 and the last in 2034.

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