

A first-class way to cut emissions

The UN has already lowered expectations of climate change negotiations to rock-bottom, but while only the most optimistic would expect a deal to emerge from Cancún ("Hoping for degrees of improvement", 25 November-2 December), the fundamental imperatives underlying the urgency to adopt more sustainable economies have not gone away.

The lack of political progress is, simply put, down to the inability of nations to work with one another, with the major fault-line splitting developed and developing economies. Negotiators could

take inspiration from the pragmatic approach the postal industry has taken in engaging carriers across the globe, irrespective of size or wealth, to tackle emissions.

The postal industry was the first services industry – and remains one of very few industries – to adopt an industry-wide, concerted approach to reducing its carbon footprint, setting an industry target of a 20% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020 based on 2008 figures.

An independent audit shows that 20 postal operators, representing some 80% of global postal volumes,

managed to cut 597,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions in their first year of International Post Corporation's Emissions Measurement and Monitoring System. Österreichische Post and Poste Italiane have recently joined the programme.

We also have an entry-level scheme for posts in developing countries and emerging economies that may not have the resources to participate in the full programme but that want to do what they can. The scheme enables all posts to share lessons and best practices.

The postal business faces a

daunting challenge: it has long depended on extensive carbon-intensive infrastructures and operates probably the largest vehicle fleet in the world, estimated at 500,000, including trucks and planes. But just because a challenge is daunting does not mean we can shy away from it, and we are making long-term capital investments to convert away, wherever possible, from carbon-intensive processes.

We are also eager to share our experience and tools with other industries, since our belief is that transparent co-operation in pursuit of joint objectives is the only way to



make progress to curb climate change.

Policy makers need to catch up where industry has led: a global political framework on climate change would enhance the impact of initiatives by industries such as ours. And it is imperative that, in their drive to slash budgets to reduce deficits, governments do not disincentivise

business investment in green technologies.

Herbert-Michael Zapf

President, International
Post Corporation
Brussels

Dag Mejdell

Chairman, International
Post Corporation
Oslo

A transparent way to protect the Arctic

Part of the challenge in monitoring and protecting the Arctic is accessing quality data about the region ("Protecting the High North", EuropeanVoice.com, 24 November). Open data government initiatives are now transforming that challenge into an opportunity.

Norway currently leads the pack with its efforts in publishing publicly available data (from both the public and private sectors) relevant to the Arctic region. Another initiative, Arctic Web, which is supported by energy companies and utilises open data sets, allows all users to search for data in the Arctic region on issues such as marine production, ship movements, oil exploration, and wildlife habitats.

Norway and Arctic Web provide examples of what can be done to both protect and explore the Arctic when sharing and openness are prioritised. If other regions adopted open data standards, knowledge reservoirs would be unleashed.

Erin Lynch
Oslo

Lisbon: a success?

The December 2001 Laeken Declaration, which ultimately led to the Lisbon treaty ("A year of living dangerously," 25 November-2 December), identified two essential challenges for the EU.

One was the enlargements of 2004 and 2007. The Union and its institutions have successfully absorbed those without too many problems. The other was the gap between the EU and its citizens – and the latest Eurobarometer survey shows that that gap is growing. Unless that gap begins to narrow, the Lisbon treaty will be adjudged at least a partial failure.

Staffan Nilsson
President, European Economic
and Social Committee
Brussels

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