

# China's consumers emit more than US for the first time

- 18:00 04 December 2011 by [Michael Marshall](#)
- For similar stories, visit the [Climate Change](#) Topic Guide

In the inglorious race to warm the planet, developing countries are catching up. For the first time, China's consumers are responsible for more carbon dioxide emissions than their US counterparts are – and consumption in developing countries now generates more carbon dioxide than that in developed countries.

Until recently the most significant trend was rich nations' practice of effectively [exporting their emissions](#). They do this by shutting down their own factories and importing goods from China or other emerging economies. In 2008, for instance, [one-third of China's domestic emissions came from the manufacture of goods for export](#), which means that [consumers in rich countries were ultimately to blame](#) for those emissions.

That situation is now changing, says [Glen Peters](#) of the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo, in Norway. Consumers in developing countries – those [not included in annex B to the Kyoto protocol](#) – released more CO<sub>2</sub> than consumers in [developed](#) countries. As a leading emerging economy, China's emissions grew 10.4 per cent last year. "The developing countries' excuses are starting to drop away," says Peters.

## Committed to cuts

That's not the full story, however, says [John Moore](#) of Beijing Normal University in China. There are far more developing countries than developed countries, and China's high emissions are largely a product of its huge population, he says. This means that consumption per person in China is still far lower than in the US.

Moreover, Moore also says [China has shown far more commitment to cutting emissions](#) than most developed countries: it puts up a new wind turbine every hour on average, for instance. Pressure on local officials to meet emissions targets is so intense that last year [Anping county temporarily cut power to homes and public facilities](#), including traffic lights, to do so. "If China makes a promise to cut emissions, they will do it," Moore says.

Ultimately, both developed and developing countries will have to [slash their emissions dramatically](#) if we are to limit climate change to a manageable level. "It's pointless to keep blaming each other," Moore says.

Journal reference: [Nature Climate Change](#), DOI: 10.1038/nclimate1332