**What is the Kyoto Protocol? (From BBC News, February 16, 2006)** Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement setting targets for industrialized countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. These gases are considered at least partly responsible for global warming - the rise in global temperature which may have catastrophic consequences for life on Earth. The protocol was agreed to in 1997, based on principles set out in a framework convention signed in 1992.

**What are the targets?**

Industrialized countries have committed to cut their combined emissions to 5% below 1990 levels by 2008 – 2012 (countries have various target dates). Each country that signed the protocol agreed to its own specific target. EU countries are expected to cut their present emissions by 8% and Japan by 5%. Some countries with low emissions were permitted to increase them. Russia initially wavered over signing the protocol, amid speculation that it was jockeying for more favorable terms. But the country's cabinet agreed to back Kyoto in September 2004.

**When did the Kyoto Protocol come into force?**

The Kyoto Protocol became a legally binding treaty on February 16, 2005. It could only come into force after two conditions had been fulfilled:

* It had been ratified by at least 55 countries
* It had been ratified by nations accounting for at least 55% of emissions from what the Treaty calls "Annex 1" countries - 38 industrialized countries given targets for reducing emissions, plus Belarus, Turkey and now Kazakhstan.

The first target was met in 2002. But following the decision of the United States and Australia not to ratify, Russia's position became crucial for the fulfillment of the second condition. It finally did ratify on November 18, 2004, and the Kyoto Protocol came into force 90 days later - on February 16, 2005. The targets for reducing emissions then become binding on all the Annex 1 countries which have ratified the Protocol. The two main countries which have not are Australia and the USA. (Australia actually did ratify the treaty December 3, 2007. The US remains the only country to not agree to it.)

**Why did Russia decide to back the treaty?**

The deciding factor appears to have been the political benefits Russia stands to gain. In particular, there has been talk of stronger European Union support for Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organization, when it ratifies the protocol. Fears still persist in Russia that Kyoto could badly affect the country's economic growth. However, Russia will be able to make a lot of money selling credits when emissions trading gets under way, because its economy collapsed after 1990. The protocol does not require Russia to decrease its emissions from their 1990 level at all, but its output of greenhouse gases has shrunk by nearly 40%.

**Have the targets been achieved?**

Industrialized countries cut their overall emissions by about 3% from 1990 to 2000. But this was largely because a sharp decrease in emissions from the collapsing economies of former Soviet countries masked an 8% rise among rich countries. The UN says industrialized countries are now well off target for the end of the decade and predicts emissions 10% above 1990 levels by 2010. The treaty suffered a massive blow in 2001 when the US, responsible for about a quarter of the world's emissions, pulled out. There is not even any certainty that the 15 countries that were members of the EU in 1997 will meet their collective target of an 8% reduction on 1990 levels. France, Sweden and the UK have already done so, but others - such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland - have made no progress at all.

**Why did the US pull out?**

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US President George W Bush pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, saying implementing it would gravely damage the US economy. His administration dubbed the treaty "fatally flawed", partly because it does not require developing countries to commit to emissions reductions. China and India fall into this category, although they are two of the world's biggest producers of greenhouse gases. Mr. Bush says he backs emissions reductions through voluntary action and new energy technologies.

**How much difference will Kyoto make?**

Most climate scientists say that the targets set in the Kyoto Protocol are merely scratching the surface of the problem. The agreement aims to reduce emissions from industrialized nations only by around 5%, whereas the consensus among many climate scientists is that in order to avoid the worst consequences of global warming, emissions cuts in the order of 60% across the board are needed. This has led to criticisms that the agreement is toothless, as well as being virtually obsolete without US support. But others say its failure would be a disaster as, despite its flaws, it sets out a framework for future negotiations which could take another decade to rebuild. Kyoto commitments have been signed into law in some countries, US states and in the EU, and will stay in place regardless of the fate of the protocol itself.

**What about poor countries?**

The agreement acknowledges that developing countries contribute least to climate change but will quite likely suffer most from its effects. Many have signed it. They do not have to commit to specific targets, but have to report their emissions levels and develop national climate change mitigation programs. China and India, potential major polluters with huge populations and growing economies, have both ratified the protocol.

**What is emissions trading?**

Emissions trading works by allowing countries to buy and sell their agreed allowances of greenhouse gas emissions. Highly polluting countries can buy unused "credits" from those which are allowed to emit more than they actually do. Countries are also able to gain credits for activities which boost the environment's capacity to absorb carbon. These include tree planting and soil conservation, and can be carried out in the country itself, or by that country working in a developing country.

1. When was the Kyoto Protocol agreed to?

2. What were the two conditions the KP had to meet worldwide for it to become a legally binding treaty?

3. What country needed to ratify the KP for it to officially go into effect? What date did this country ratify the KP on?

4. What were Russia’s concerns about ratifying the treaty? How does Russia stand to make money off of other countries with the KP?

5. Even though industrialized countries cut their combined emissions by 3% in the 90s, why was this “progress” actually achieved?

6. What was President Bush’s reason for backing out of the treaty the US had previously agreed to? Do you think this was a legitimate concern?

7. What eventually happened to the US economy at the end of President Bush’s term?

8. What two countries with very large populations and booming economies agreed to conduct themselves by the higher standards of the KP even though they weren’t asked to? Why would they do this in your opinion?

9. What do you think about emissions trading? Should countries with good environmental policies in place be allowed to profit off of less environmentally responsible countries?

10. In your opinion, what right does the US have to be the only country to not agree to something the rest of the world has agreed to? Do you think that air pollution and the potentially disastrous effects of global warming are things the whole world should care about?