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Oil industry targets EU climate policy

- US lobby seeks to derail Kyoto measures
- Documents show plan to sway post-2012 agenda

David Adam in Montreal
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Lobbyists funded by the US oil industry have launched a campaign in Europe aimed at derailing efforts to tackle greenhouse gas pollution and climate change.

Documents obtained by Greenpeace and seen by the Guardian reveal a systematic plan to persuade European business, politicians and the media that the EU should abandon its commitments under the Kyoto protocol, the international agreement that aims to reduce emissions that lead to global warming. The disclosure comes as United Nations climate change talks in Montreal on the future of Kyoto, the first phase of which expires in 2012, enter a critical phase.

The documents, an email and a PowerPoint presentation, describe efforts to establish a European coalition to "challenge the course of the EU's post-2012 agenda". They were written by Chris Horner, a Washington DC lawyer and senior fellow at the rightwing thinktank, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which has received more than \$1.3m (£750,000) funding from the US oil giant Exxon Mobil. Mr Horner also acts for the Cooler Heads Coalition, a group set up "to dispel the myth of global warming".

The PowerPoint document sets out plans to establish a group called the European Sound Climate Policy Coalition. It says: "In the US an informal coalition has helped successfully to avert adoption of a Kyoto-style program. This model should be emulated, as appropriate, to guide similar efforts in Europe."

During the 1990s US oil companies and other corporations funded a group called the Global Climate Coalition, which emphasised uncertainties in climate science and disputed the need to take action. It was disbanded when President Bush pulled the US out of the Kyoto process. Its website now says: "The industry voice on climate change has served its purpose by contributing to a new national approach to global warming."

In January Sir Robert May, the former government chief scientist who stepped down as president of the Royal Society last week, warned in the Guardian that US lobby groups with links to the oil industry were turning their attention to the other side of the Atlantic. He wrote that a "lobby of professional sceptics who opposed action to tackle climate change" were targeting Britain because of its high profile in the debate.

Countries signed up to the Kyoto process have legal commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Oil and energy companies would be affected by these cuts because burning their products produce most emissions.

The PowerPoint document written by Mr Horner appears to be aimed at getting RWE, the German utility company, to join a European coalition of companies to act against Kyoto.

The document says: "The current political realities in Brussels open a window of opportunity to challenge the course of the EU's post-2012 agenda." It adds: "Brussels must openly acknowledge and address them willingly or through third party pressure."

It says industry associations are the "wrong way to do this" but suggests that a cross-industry coalition, of up to six companies each paying €10,000 (£6,700), could "counter the commission's Kyoto agenda". Such a coalition could help steer debate, it says, by targeting journalists and bloggers, as well as attending environmental group events to "share information on opposing viewpoints and tactics".

RWE says it met Mr Horner earlier this year but that they have not taken the idea forward.

In the email, dated January 28 this year, Mr Horner describes Europe as an "opportunity". He says it "would be like Neil Armstrong, it's a developing untapped frontier". He adds: "US companies need someone they can trust, and it's just a den of thieves over there."

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