VEHICLES AND COP26: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.

The 26th Conference Of the Parties (COP26), the major global climate conference in Glasgow, is now over. Now's the time to look back on what the attendees, including various world leaders, achieved. Including what it all means for your business vehicles.

1.5°C: The Paris Agreement

The 1.5°C target comes from COP21 in Paris - or more specifically, the Paris Agreement; a legally binding commitment to limit global warming to within 2°C – or, ideally, within 1.5°C – of pre-industrial temperatures in the decades ahead. Almost 200 countries signed up to this agreement, and they've all been working towards reducing emissions, so these overall targets can be met.

COP26 - The Glasgow Climate Pact

This year the hosts, the UK Government, dedicated the COP26 to "keeping 1.5°C alive". This year's COP was a pivotal opportunity for countries to update and strengthen their plans for reducing emissions in line with the Paris Agreement's goals.

To this end, just over 150 countries produced updated plans – known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) - ahead of COP26 – including China, the world's biggest emitter of carbon. However, some countries didn't, including India, who are a fast-industrialising nation still heavily dependent on fossil fuels. While at COP26 India did piece together an updated NDC, but this was judged to be "short on details" by the Climate Action Tracker, among others.

Agreements were also made between governments during the conference. Most of these were written into the Glasgow Climate Pact, alongside an accelerated timetable for revising and strengthening NDCs. Instead of every five years, each countries' NDCs will be reviewed at next year's COP and again in 2023.

According to Alok Sharma, the UK Government Minister presiding over COP26, the conference "keeps 1.5°C within reach". Although some countries have not been as ambitious as most, there is still the phasing down of coal from India and China to support a positive move in climate action and change.

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What does this mean for your business vehicles?

According to the International Energy Agency, a quarter of all direct CO_2 emissions from fuel combustion comes from transport. Road transport accounts for almost three-quarters of that. Since the Kyoto Summit in 1998, all industries were asked to tackle their CO_2 emissions. While most sectors reduced these emissions by an average of 40%, transport has only managed to reduce emissions by around 6%. However, electric vehicles now mean that road transport should become easy to decarbonise. Therefore, doing your part in reaching 1.5°C and transitioning to electric vehicles is absolutely crucial.

The COP26 schedule included an entire day devoted to transport, and the major developments concerning electric vehicles. Various national governments, city governments, organisations and vehicle manufacturers, including Ford and Mercedes-Benz, signed a declaration around “accelerating the transition to 100% zero emission cars and vans”. This included the commitment to “work towards all sales of new cars and vans being zero emission… globally by 2040 and by no later than 2035 in leading markets”.

This deal is significant, even if it’s not legally binding. Plus, while we know the UK has pledged to ban the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans in the UK by 2030 (2035 for certain hybrids), judging by the COP26 declaration other countries intend to follow suit.

What’s more, the inclusion of big manufacturers means that even if governments don’t force motorists to drive electric, fewer and fewer fossil-fuelled vehicles will be coming off production lines in the years ahead.

Not only is electrification good for the environment and essential for hitting the 1.5°C target but thanks to supportive benefit in kind taxation, infrastructure and investment incentives from the Government there can be real financial advantages for both employers and employees who make the transition now.

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