

County moves to reduce 'greenhouse gases'

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Plans to reduce so-called greenhouse gas emissions in unincorporated Santa Barbara County are moving forward after the Planning Commission voted 4-1 to recommend a draft Climate Action Study for approval by the Board of Supervisors.

Approval from the supervisors paves the way for a development of an implementation plan. The document is part of an effort to address several mandates that require the reduction statewide of gases thought to trap heat in the atmosphere -- carbon dioxide and methane among them -- and call for steps to meet those ends.

Goals include reducing greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020, and then reducing them to 80 percent of 1990 levels by 2050.

Fifth District commission representative Daniel Blough voted no Wednesday.

The Climate Action Study takes into account an inventory of emissions countywide, efforts being made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and measures that could be taken to reduce them even more. According to the study, greenhouse gases in the county amount to 1.78 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, most of which come from the transportation sector, followed by the electricity and the industrial sectors.

Reduction measures include energy efficiency programs, promotion of green building practices, water recycling, and carbon sequestration and removal.

The document was praised by environmental groups for attempting to meet -- and in some instances exceed -- state standards for the reduction of greenhouse gases.

"There are many great ideas in the different emissions reduction measures, and a lot of these things can help the county and county residents save money in the long term, while having significant co-benefits," said Michael Chiacos, from the Community Environmental Council.

However the tightening standards have also been troublesome to those in business, given the extra investment in the face of a sputtering economy.

"Climate Action (Plan) is going to have a financial impact on everybody," said Jerry Bunin, government affairs director for the Home Builders Association of the Central Coast. He called for greater outreach for a greater breadth of public input. The Board of Supervisors will be given the choice of setting a reduction target of 15 percent from today's emissions by 2020 or setting some other target, given the lack of a state or federal mandate for local governments for reduction targets.

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