

COG Board Adopts Significant Regional Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets

Washington, D.C. – Taking an unprecedented action, today the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board of Directors voluntarily adopted stringent goals for reducing the region’s greenhouse gas emissions. COG’s decision, one of the few in the country to affect a multi-state region, proposes to return to 2005 levels of regional greenhouse gas emissions by 2012. The mid-range goal is for a reduction of 20 percent below the 2005 levels by 2020, and the long-term goal is for a reduction of 80 percent below the 2005 levels by 2050.

“Most of the recommendations in this climate change report are common sense things that your mom used to tell you to do,” said Montgomery County Councilmember Nancy Floreen, who serves as Chair of the COG Climate Change Steering Committee. “In the fight against climate change, we want to remind citizens that small actions like turning off the lights, lowering the thermostat, walking more, and riding the bus can add up to a big impact and can help them save money at the same time.”

The National Capital Region Climate Change Report is one of the nation's first initiatives to address local greenhouse gas emissions on a regional level. While a growing number of individual cities and counties are moving forward to address climate change, this is one of the first programs to involve localities over an entire metropolitan area. The region’s elected officials view this approach as one that will provide a catalyst for improving the environment and provide for a prosperous and sustainable future.

Gerald Connolly, Chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and Representative-elect (VA-11th District), indicated the need to act on the issue. “I believe the debate over the science of global warming needs to end and addressing the reality of global warming should begin,” Connolly said.

Many board members voiced their belief in the importance of presenting the report to the incoming administration of President-elect Barack Obama. As one of the few multi-state regions to act on the issue of climate change, Floreen stated that this report and the metropolitan Washington region should serve as a model for the nation. One essential element for businesses, states, and localities is consistent standards for policies and practices. Using the federal CAFE standards for fuel efficiency as an example, Floreen noted that industries and governments adapt better if there are consistent standards.

The metropolitan Washington region is growing. COG forecasts an addition of 1.6 million new residents and 1.2 million new jobs to the region by 2030. Based on current business-as-usual projections of growth in population, housing, employment, and energy use, total greenhouse gas emissions in the region will increase by 33 percent by 2030 and 43 percent by 2050.

The most cost-effective options for reducing greenhouse gas emissions are improving energy efficiency of buildings and appliances, and increasing the fuel efficiency of vehicles. Other options involve shifting to less carbon-intensive energy sources, such as

solar, wind, and nuclear power. An independent study published in 2007 concluded that the savings of these measures outweigh the costs.

There are also important potential costs of inaction. The country has already begun to feel the effects of climate change through higher temperatures, flooding, and related health effects. These consequences will only worsen if action is not taken immediately. There could be significant costs for repairs, maintenance, and health impacts. The effects could also have a disproportionate effect on the elderly, children, and the homeless.

In addition to increases in air temperature, there is tangible evidence that the metropolitan Washington region is experiencing the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels and a warmer Chesapeake Bay. Since 1940, water temperature in the Chesapeake Bay has risen by about half a degree per decade. If this trend continues in this century, it could result in a five degree jump. The impacts, which are already being observed, could be dramatic, not just on the Bay and its many ecosystems, but on the region's residents and economy as well.

The report is the culmination of an intense, year-and-a-half long effort by COG's Climate Change Steering Committee, which was comprised of officials from the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. The officials believe the report will help the metropolitan Washington region take the lead in the fight against the effects of climate change. The next steps for the Board include setting priorities for achieving the report's goals and creating an organization structure for an ongoing COG Climate Change Initiative.

To view the report adopted by the COG Board of Directors, [click here](#).

COG is the association of 21 local governments working together for a better metropolitan region.

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