

NEWS

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For more information, contact
David Wert, Public Information Officer
(909) 387-5412
dwert@sbcounty.gov

Supervisors ramp up effort to protect the environment

The County of San Bernardino today broadened its leadership role in protecting the environment by adopting measures that will make wildlife preservation and air quality a central element of future growth in the county.

In separate actions today, the Board of Supervisors launched the preparation of a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan, initiated a program to expand and refine data collection on key animals, plants and wildlife corridors in the county, and set forth a plan to further protect native species and biological resources as part of the approval process for development projects.

The board's actions build upon a series of environmental initiatives approved in August reflecting the county's commitment to make environmental protection a central part of its land use policies.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane noted that such efforts are significant in a county that takes in vast expanses of pristine desert, Alpine forests, as well as urbanized communities.

"As the state's most environmentally diverse county, the County of San Bernardino is proud to lead the way in addressing climate change and protection of native species as we go about the business of managing growth and providing for the needs of our citizens," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane.

One of the actions taken by the Board of Supervisors today allocated \$30,000 to hire a consultant to assist the county in developing a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan and approved a timetable that will see the plan completed by March 2010. The plan will involve an inventory of greenhouse gases in the county and a plan to reduce greenhouse gas production and measure results. The plan will focus on county operations and the impacts of county land use decisions.

The second action approved by the board today involves three initiatives:

-MORE-

Environmental Measures

December 11, 2007

Page 2

- The county will tap the expertise of the Redlands-based San Bernardino County Museum to develop a geographic information and web-based database system for identifying important animals and plants as well as wildlife corridors in the county.
- The county will develop guidelines that will use conditions of approval on development projects and comprehensive plans as a means of protecting native species and conserving important plants and animals by July 1. This will be accomplished in part through a land ownership transfer program and a land conservation easement program.
- The third initiative is not directly related to environmental protection, but also addresses a key issue facing the county: disaster preparedness. The county will update the County Hazard Mitigation Plan to address wildfire evacuation plans, and in the process monitor population growth and evaluate road capacities and hazards.

The actions by the Board of Supervisors today build upon a tradition of providing leadership in the way local government addresses environmental issues.

- On August 27 of this year, the Board of Supervisors approved the Green County San Bernardino initiative, which mandated that future county building projects meet tough established environmental standards and created incentives for builders and homeowners to incorporate green elements into their projects.
- The County of San Bernardino created the state's first regional air quality planning element, which earned the 1991 SCAQMD Clean Air Award, the 1991 CSAC Challenge Award, and the 1993 Southern California Gas Company Partners in Energy Efficiency Award. This resulted in critical policies and procedures that have been integrated into the development review process through the county General Plan and Development Code since the early '90s and reiterated and strengthened in the 2007 General Plan Update and Development Code.
- In 2004, the County of San Bernardino became one of the first counties in the state to launch a fleet of hybrid vehicles, purchasing 20 Toyota Prius sedans. Currently, the county Motor Pool has 48 hybrid vehicles in its fleet – 38 sedans and 10 4x4 SUVs. The vehicles average 42 MPG in combined city/highway driving. These vehicles are in such high demand that some county employees arrange their workloads around hybrid availability. The county is committed to purchasing/providing the lowest emission vehicles available. Research indicates that hybrids produce 90% less emissions than the average gasoline-fueled vehicle, and produce zero emissions when running in electric mode. This year, the county plans to purchase 30 additional hybrids, a combination of sedans and SUVs. Long-term, the goal is to add 30-35 hybrids to the fleet every year.
- The county is also exploring the purchase of 10 all-electric trucks later this year. Electric vehicles are considered 100% cleaner than any gasoline vehicle and are ideal for in-town, stop-and-go type driving, where typical gasoline-engine vehicles are least efficient.
- The county has also applied to South Coast Air Quality Management District to participate in a plug-in hybrid experiment later this year. This project proposes converting Toyota Prius hybrids to plug-in hybrids, meaning that when parked the vehicle can be plugged into a standard outlet to recharge the batteries, lessening the amount of time the gasoline engine has to run. Preliminary reports indicate fuel mileage as high as 100 MPG using plug-ins hybrid technology.

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- The county continues to research and purchase the lowest emissions vehicles available, even for the conventional sedans. All new sedans purchased by the county are at least Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) rated or cleaner, which means they are at least 13% cleaner than the average gasoline fueled vehicle. Currently about 33% of the Motor Pool's nearly 1,700 vehicles are ULEV or better, with a goal of at least 45% ULEV by June 2008.
- The County of San Bernardino Regional Parks Department recently obtained 10 electric maintenance carts to replace gas-powered vehicles.
- The County Public Works Department/Flood Control District recently purchased eight solar-powered highway message boards to replace noisy gasoline- and diesel-powered units.
- Public Works also purchased two air vacuums to remove dirt from cracks in the county's roadways prior to repair, replacing the practice of blowing the dirt into the air with air compressors.
- Public Works also purchased five liquid natural gas heavy-duty water trucks, dump trucks, and an asphalt-patch truck to replace diesel-powered units. The county has ordered three additional liquid natural gas heavy-duty trucks in order to remove more diesel-powered units from the fleet. Each liquid natural gas truck reduces greenhouse gases placed in the air each year by approximately 300 pounds and reduces the Particulate Matter by approximately 37 pounds each per year.
- The county plans to purchase seven compressed natural gas heavy-duty trucks to replace diesel-powered units.
- The county has implemented programs to reduce the unnecessary idling of diesel trucks, including using GPS technology to monitor idling.
- The county has received \$100,000 in grant funds from the South Coast Air Quality Management District and currently has a grant request application under consideration for an additional \$250,000 to assist with the future purchase of alternative-fuel heavy-duty vehicles.
- The county's Economic Development Agency is working with the City of Victorville and Inland Energy Inc. to develop the world's first hybrid power plant, which will generate 563 megawatts using 250 acres of solar thermal collectors in combination with natural gas generators.
- For more than two decades the county Human Resources Department has operated an active and effective Commuter Services Program to encourage, coordinate, and reward carpooling, provide information about public transportation and other alternatives to solo commuting. Because the county is by far the largest employer in the Inland Empire with nearly 20,000 employees, these efforts have a very real impact on the quality of our atmosphere.