

San Bernardino County to waive fees for solar, wind systems

The program is an effort to join the move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

By Sara Lin, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

August 28, 2007

Environmentally friendly developers and homeowners in San Bernardino County could start seeing green -- and saving money -- thanks to initiatives announced Monday by county supervisors.

Under a four-part plan unveiled by board Chairman Paul Biane that is expected to be approved by the Board of Supervisors today, the county will waive building permit fees for homeowners installing solar and wind-generated energy systems and expedite applications from developers whose projects meet certain green-building criteria.

"Time is money," Biane said. "We're encouraging residents and businesses to make changes that will help us cut our greenhouse gas emissions."

Homeowners currently pay \$200 for a solar permit and \$250 for a wind-energy permit, county planning officials said.

In a rare show of solidarity, environmentalists and developers alike applauded the county's new plan, which also features a county website encouraging residents to "go green" and a pledge by supervisors that new county buildings and any renovations of existing facilities will comply with national green building standards. Several California counties, including Orange and Marin, have incorporated greenhouse gas measures in their planning.

Jane Block of the Endangered Habitats League, an environmental organization, praised the county's new plan. She thanked supervisors "for going for good things in solar energy and conservation."

The green push comes a week after county leaders settled a lawsuit brought by California Atty. Gen. Jerry Brown. Brown's highly publicized suit sought to reduce global warming emissions by attacking sprawl. Environmental planners have criticized San Bernardino County, the largest county by size in the lower 48 states, for its spread-out subdivisions. The county expects more than 500,000 new residents to move in by 2030, bringing its population to 2.5 million.

Supervisors said the rollout of their new initiatives was not related to last week's settlement.

Under San Bernardino County's new plan, several other energy-efficient technologies for the home will be covered by the permit fee waiver, include tankless water heaters and energy-efficient heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems. The priority processing for green builders will shave weeks off a review process that can last more than a year.

The county is also trying to cut carbon emissions by expanding its fleet of hybrid cars, county officials said.

Still, at least one environmental group would like to see San Bernardino County do more to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental advocacy group, has not settled its suit against the county.

"But will these measures result in substantial or meaningful reduction of greenhouse gases from county's current emission levels? Probably not, because they all deal with more growth," said Jonathan Evans, staff attorney with Center for Biological Diversity. "But these are positive first steps."

sara.lin@latimes.com