

Green groups raise pressure on San Bernardino County

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An environmental group that is suing San Bernardino County over its general plan has launched a petition drive urging supervisors to adopt a plan to reduce global warming.

The Center for Biological Diversity, which is based in Tucson, Ariz., and Proposition Earth Inc., a Running Springs group that formed last year, announced this week that they would begin gathering signatures from county residents in support of a climate change action plan.

Jonathan Evans, an attorney with the center, said the county should take a page from cities like San Bernardino and Yucaipa that have signed on to the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, pledging to fight climate change.

The agreement, a promise to consider the impact that land-use and other decisions have on increasing greenhouse gases, was started by Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels two years ago and has been joined by more than 450 mayors. Evans said several counties also have joined the effort.

"It simply requires the county to recognize the importance of the issue," he said.

The groups hope over the next few months to collect several thousand signatures and submit them to the Board of Supervisors, Evans said.

The action plan that the groups are seeking would require the county to determine how much it contributes to greenhouse gas emission, set a goal for reducing those gases and encourage energy-efficient options such as solar panels for new development, he said.

County spokesman David Wert said supervisors will listen to any petition brought by residents but called the groups' criticism of the county disingenuous.

He said the county general plan includes several measures to counter the effects of growth, such as promoting development that mixes housing near job centers and the use of solar energy.

"It's an outright lie to say the county has ignored the issue," Wert said.

Wert said that the cities that have signed on to the agreement, which is a nonbinding promise, have not all taken the steps suggested by the center. He added that cities and counties are limited in what they can do to reduce global warming.

"They know full well local governments don't have authority to limit the number of cars in the streets, planes flying in the air or trains that go through our community," Wert said.

The Center for Biological Diversity already is a party to a lawsuit filed in April along with the Sierra Club and the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society. The suit accuses the county of not analyzing the impact of development on global warming in its general plan, a blueprint for future growth. The state attorney general's office also is challenging the document, which the county adopted in March.

Evans described the lawsuit and petition as separate efforts to get the county to reduce global warming, which he said already is affecting the area through wildfires and drought.

"This is just the start of the campaign to force the county to address the issue," he said. "We think in the long run they'll listen."

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