

Bay Area pollution district eyes first guidelines for reducing global warming

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California developers seeking city or county building approval have to look at how their projects affect traffic, schools, water, smog and wildlife. They may have to add a new concern: global warming.

The Bay Area's air pollution district is proposing the nation's first-ever guidelines for when projects would produce enough global warming gases to warrant an environmental review of ways to reduce them.

Pollution agency administrators call their plan a bold step to guide local governments in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from new housing subdivisions, office buildings, schools, baseball

parks, movie theaters and other developments. Projects typically lead to more energy and vehicle use, producing more carbon dioxide and other global warming gases.

"We want to make sure development minimizes its impact on greenhouse gases," said Harry Hilken, director of planning for the nine-county Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "The state has passed legislation with goals to reduce these emissions in several sectors, but there has been a big void about how to get new development to contribute its fair share."

Developers could lower their carbon footprints by locating homes near train stations, bus stops and work centers, providing shuttles from job sites to BART stations, and designing buildings to exceed energy-efficiency standards for lighting and heating.

Measures to slash trash generation would help, too, because rotting garbage generates methane, also a global warming gas.

The plan is coming under fire from developers and planners in Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco, Livermore and Alameda County.

They say that expensive pollution reduction studies could inhibit environmentally sound housing projects that minimize traffic emissions by locating near transit centers, shops, and downtowns.

"The guidelines would not promote regional smart growth, which is fundamental to achieving greenhouse gas reduction goals" in land use and transportation, Dan Marks, Berkeley planning director, wrote in an Oct. 26 letter to the air district. "While we applaud the district's efforts to be a leader on the issue, we believe that the draft guidelines are



fundamentally flawed."

While the guidelines would be advisory, cities and counties that ignored them would risk lawsuits from development opponents, who could argue that local agencies were ignoring environmental impacts.

Air district officials deny that their proposal will slow or kill environmentally sound projects.

In response to the sharp criticism, air district administrators recommend that the agency's 22-member board postpone until January a vote on the plan that had been scheduled for today. A public hearing will go ahead as planned at 9:45 a.m. today at the district's headquarters in San Francisco.

Under the guidelines, projects generating 1,100 metric tons a year of global warming gases — roughly equivalent to that from a 55-home subdivision — would have significant enough impacts to require an environmental review.

Projects would have two alternative means of meeting the guidelines.

Developments would have no significant impact if they generated no more than 4.6 metric tons per year of emissions per each subdivision resident or each employee at a business.

Developments also would be exempt from costly environmental studies if they complied with energy and transportation efficiency measures in a climate action plan adopted by the city or county government. Berkeley has adopted a climate action plan, and many other cities and counties are planning to do so.

Hilken said climate action plans are a more

comprehensive way of fighting global warming because they map out strategies for an entire city or county — not one development at a time.

However, not all cities can afford to develop climate plans, said Paul Campos, attorney for the Building Industry Association of Northern California. "It's a cop out for a regional agency to tell cities they should adopt their own global warming plans," he said.

Matt Vespa, attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, praised the air district. "The air district has taken a reasonable approach to a very serious problem, and the building industry is trying to stall."

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PUBLIC HEARING

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District will hold a public hearing at 9:45 a.m. today on proposed guidelines for cities and counties in reviewing global warming gas emissions from a new developments. The meeting will be at the air district's headquarters, 939 Ellis St., San Francisco. Information about the proposal can be viewed at <http://www.baaqmd.gov/Divisions/Planning-and-Research/Planning-Programs-and-Initiatives/CEQA-GUIDELINES.aspx>.