



Climate Action at the Local Level

By Gary G. Allen, Executive Director, Center for Chesapeake Communities

The reports and evidence are all around us; describing the changes in our planet, our way of life and the future that awaits us should we fail to understand that the thin band of protection called the atmosphere is changing. No other issue threatens our planet with such dramatic, far-reaching impacts, and no other issue is so clearly a worldwide problem. At the same time, many of the most promising solutions to global warming are local initiatives providing clear opportunities for ACTION that demonstrate we can CHANGE THE FUTURE.

Planning is already under way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Maryland. Local governments are beginning to emerge as leaders in combating global warming. These new efforts represent important steps forward and help make clear that all local governments—and all citizens—have a responsibility to address global climate change.

The scientific consensus expects substantial changes not only in temperature but also in rainfall patterns, water supply, snow levels, Bay health, local air quality, and sea level. These changes are not in the distant future, but are in evidence now: CO₂ has risen by 37% and the Bay is 2 degrees warmer over the last few decades.

Addressing these issues will require action by government, businesses, and individuals. In almost every case, it's good for the community's quality of life and good for the local economy. Outlined on the next several pages are steps to move even more boldly forward to **mitigate** the greenhouse gases emissions that cause global warming and **adapt** to the anticipated future conditions caused by climate change.

Mitigation are those actions that serve to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to slow down the rate of global warming. Local mitigation policies should be comprehensive, targeting a range of local responsibilities and opportunities. Each, when combined with other uniquely local initiatives, will define early leadership on these issues.

1 Build on existing policies and programs that result in a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from government managed facilities and the jurisdictional contribution of greenhouse gas emissions from its citizens.

2 Inventory global warming greenhouse gas emissions from city operations and create an action plan to achieve reductions.

3 Identify best practices to support reducing overall local government energy use and set goals for their achievement.

4 Manage the operation and procurement of fleet vehicles under the control of the city to track and achieve annual mileage per vehicle type improvements.

5 Establish a municipal goal of 10% renewable energy purchase by 2011 and 20% by 2015 in cooperation with other local governments.

6 Practice and promote sustainable building practices using the U. S. Green Building Council's LEED program to ensure all new city facilities meet "LEED Silver" or higher standards and make energy efficiency a priority in all site plan review.

7 Promote transportation options such as bicycle/pedestrian trails, commuter trip reduction programs, and incentives for car pooling and public transit. Encourage existing and develop new programs to enhance use of public transit and alternative transportation modes, commuter connections, guaranteed ride home, telework programs, park and ride lots and smart bike programs.

8 Promote increased citizen and business participation in all areas of recycling, increasing the rate of recycling waste as a percentage of total waste at a rate of at least 2% per calendar year, for the next five years.

9 Maintain a healthy urban forest and street tree population through the adoption of a community canopy goal and community greening ordinance for conservation, restoration, maintenance and expansion of the canopy. Consider and adopt incentives within one year of goal adoption to

promote tree planting on private lands, to increase shading, energy savings and to improve air quality, incorporating current Maryland state "plant a tree" incentives.

10 Adopt, refine and follow land use guidelines that reduce sprawl, preserve open space and create a cooler, compact and walkable community.

11 Conduct public outreach through the city website, and through staff and citizen committees to educate the public, schools and local businesses about the benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Use outreach tools to encourage the purchase of more efficient and alternative fueled vehicles, and to encourage energy audits and retrofits for individuals and businesses through regional cooperative efforts.

12 Prepare an annual Governing Green Report card to the community documenting progress towards reducing the city's carbon footprint.

Local planning for climate change and sea level rise is challenging. There are many potential impacts and no single remedy. Climate change and sea level rise are both gradual processes occurring slowly over time. However local governments must take specific action now to prepare for inevitable impacts. **Adaption** are the steps that local governments can take to ensure that the impacts will be minimized, and public health, the local economy and the environment will be protected.

1 Climate Science: Conduct a water and land resources climate change impact analysis of your community (e.g. groundwater resources, precipitation patterns, etc). Build awareness of climate change impacts and adaptation measures (e.g., create a climate change outreach database; invest in education/outreach, etc.).



**Climate
Change**



2 Public Health, Safety & Emergency Preparedness: Collaborate in research and share information with the public health community, in areas such as thermal stress, infectious disease, food quality and supply, and social justice issues. Update emergency and hazard mitigation plans and activities to address projected changes.

3 Surface Water Management, Freshwater Quality & Water Supply: Conduct technical analysis of projected impacts to stream flows to large rivers and tributaries. Incorporate climate change impacts into water supply planning processes and wastewater treatment investment plans.

4 Land Use, Buildings and Transportation: Review all local and county plans, policies and investments for consideration or inclusion of climate change impacts (e.g., Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, Shoreline Master Plan, River and Floodplain Management Program, transportation infrastructure plans, etc). Numerous actions should be included to address flooding and sea level rise projections.

5 Financial & Economic Impacts: Examine climate change impacts on key businesses and local industries for the area including government, forestry and agriculture.

6 Biodiversity & Ecosystems: Collaborate with climate impact organizations and natural resource agencies to support the resilience of green space, native species, habitats, and biodiversity against climate change impacts. Evaluate the need for additional biodiversity monitoring.

“We need to move to that point where the Chesapeake Bay becomes not a poster child for decline and pollution, but actually a model for what can be done when a free and diverse people choose to seize their own future and make a better way... And it’s up to all of us. In your cities and in your towns, you are so close to the people we serve. You have the ability to do the things that matter, to show that we can actually employ these new technologies and protect the Bay from storm water run-off, to reduce electricity, to tap new, renewable sources of energy.....” **Governor Martin O’Malley, 2009**

Resources

Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley established the **Maryland Climate Change Commission (MCCC)** charged with collectively developing an action plan to address the causes of climate change, prepare for the likely consequences and impacts of climate change to Maryland, and establish benchmarks for implementing the Commission's recommendations. Maryland's scientific and technical assessment of climate change impacts, its mitigation strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and recommended strategies for adapting to sea level rise and increased storm surge can be found on the Climate Change Action Plan homepage <http://www.mdclimatechange.us/>.

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) – ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Campaign assists cities in adopting policies and implementing quantifiable measures to reduce local greenhouse gas emission, improve air quality, and enhance urban livability and sustainability.

EPA Web Site to help state and local government understand, plan, and implement strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The State and Local Climate and Energy Program Web site, www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate, brings together EPA

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resources to serve as a one-stop shop for those seeking information and resources related to climate change and clean energy.

Become a Leader

As you consider action on these issues consult examples in Annapolis, Bowie, Rockville, Gaithersburg, Frederick, Edmonston and other Maryland communities. Call on staff at DNR's Office for Sustainable Future, MDE and MEA and other state agencies for financial help and request assistance from the nonprofit community such as the Center for Chesapeake Communities for policy, program and technical assistance. Your community can become a leader in planning and preparation. In fact, local government leadership is imperative if we are to combat and adapt to climate change impacts already in evidence. ■

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