

Environment & Energy

California Amps Up Proposal to Slash Planet-Warming Emissions

By Zach Bright

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- Plan aims for 48% emissions drop by 2030
 - Factors in recent climate laws from Congress, state
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California's top air regulator on Wednesday accelerated the state's blueprint to cut greenhouse gas emissions in what the body's chair called "far and away the most important" update.

The plan shoots for a 48% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030—up from the previous 40% mandate—compared to 1990 levels. It also commits to no new gas plant builds in the state, and an equitable multi-agency process that transitions away from oil extraction and refining.

"California is drastically cutting our dependence on fossil fuels and cleaning our air—this plan is a comprehensive roadmap to achieve a pollution-free future," Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) said in a release.

It's also the first time the state is factoring emissions from natural working lands that include actively managed forests and fields. These can serve as carbon sinks, but events like worsening wildfires contribute to atmospheric greenhouse gases, making them a source of emissions.

The proposal's bolder goals were unlocked by a combination of funds from a record \$54 billion state climate investment, the federal tax and climate measure passed in August (Public Law 117-169), and aggressive state goals signed into law in September that fulfilled goals Newsom sought in July.

Other advancements by the California Air Resources Board are projected to contribute to the new 48% target, including a phaseout of new gas-powered vehicle sales and an ongoing process through 2023 to strengthen the state's low-carbon fuel standard.

The board will vote on the proposal, known as the "scoping plan," in a final Dec. 15-16 meeting.

Achieving the Goal

The plan's updated modeling includes goals to build three million climate-friendly homes by 2030 and seven million by 2035, deploy 6 million heat pumps by 2030, and develop 20 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2045—all asks originally made by Newsom.

It also incorporates carbon capture utilization and storage, but the plan doesn't have the technology deployed until 2028.

The Air Resources Board added that it's designed to benefit state's communities disproportionately burdened by fossil fuel pollution. It provides for a Climate Vulnerability Metric to identify communities especially vulnerable to climate change harms and worsening air quality.

The plan is designed to meet a new state law that aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 85% by 2045, compared to 1990 levels, and make the state carbon-neutral in the same year.

If implemented, the board estimates that its plan would cut air pollution by 71%, reduce fossil fuel consumption by 86%, and reduce fossil fuel consumption by 94%. It's also projected to create 4 million new jobs and save \$200 billion annually in health costs from pollution.

The board is responsible for updating the plan every five years.

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