

Environment & Energy

California Speeds Up Strategy to Reduce Climate Emissions (1)

By Zach Bright

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- Air regulator approves plan to shift economy off fossil fuels
 - Plan to cut carbon emissions nearly in half by 2030
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California aims to accelerate its climate strategy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 85% from 1990 levels by 2045 while shifting its economy away from fossil fuels under a plan a state regulator adopted Thursday.

The plan aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 48% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, a bolder goal than the previous 40% target. The state would build no new gas-fired power plants, increase funding for mass transit, and reduce oil and gas consumption to less than one-tenth of current demand.

The plan adopted by the California Air Resources Board, the state's air regulator, also calls for capturing and storing carbon dioxide, both through natural means, such as forests, and a variety of carbon capture technologies.

"Implementing this plan will achieve deep decarbonization of our entire economy, protect public health, provide a solid foundation for continued economic growth, and drastically reduce the state's dependence on fossil fuel combustion. It will clear the air in our hardest hit communities," Liane Randolph, who chairs the air board, said in a statement.

The California Air Resources Board estimates the plan would cut air pollution by 71%. The plan also is projected to create 4 million new jobs and save \$200 billion annually in health costs from pollution.

Reception With Reservations

California's largest utility and several environmental advocates expressed support for the accelerated plan ahead of the vote, but some had reservations.

The board's plan "allows for a wide range of decarbonization strategies, and will help deliver carbon neutrality through significant economy-wide emissions reductions and carbon removal," said Carla Peterman, Pacific Gas and Electric's executive vice president of corporate affairs and chief sustainability officer.

“We’re really thrilled about the opportunity—to get to 100% clean energy much faster—that’s laid out in this plan,” said Laura Deehan, state director for Environment California. “Our biggest concern is a continued over-reliance on carbon capture technologies that are unproven.”

Along with the plan’s incorporation of carbon capture utilization and storage technologies, which would start in 2028, it received other criticisms from groups such as the Center for Progressive Reform, which said in an online post that the plan had a “lack of clear implementation strategy.”

Plan Updates

The plan’s updated modeling includes goals to build 3 million climate-friendly homes by 2030 and 7 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 Gov. Gavin Newsom (D).

Other key decisions from the Air Resources Board that will help toward the goal include a full phaseout of new gas-powered vehicle sales by 2035 and a process to strengthen the state’s low-carbon fuel standard in 2023.

Those developments and unprecedented funding—a record \$54 billion state climate investment and money to the state from the federal tax and climate measure passed in August (Public Law 117-169)—also opened up the accelerated pathway, according to the California Air Resources Board.

CARB is tasked under state law with updating the state’s climate strategy twice a decade.

(Updated with board adoption of plan and comment by CARB chair.)

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