

Environment & Energy

Newsom Steps Up California's Climate Strategy With New Laws

By Zach Bright

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- Six significant measures signed in win for governor
 - State to adopt emissions reduction plan by year's end
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New California laws that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, boost clean energy goals, limit oil and gas drilling, and create a carbon capture framework were signed Friday by Gov. Gavin Newsom (D).

The six most significant measures Newsom signed complement the state's \$54 billion climate budget and cap off his first-term portfolio of environmental legislation ahead of his re-election run in November and a possible presidential bid.

"This is about law. This is not about ambition. This is not an executive order. This is not a promotion," Newsom said ahead of the signing. "This is a promise that we now need to deliver."

Newsom also drew contrast between \$3 billion recently passed for electric vehicle infrastructure by the state Legislature to \$58.6 million President Joe Biden announced on Wednesday for electric vehicle infrastructure in California.

His signature on the bills, among more than 40 climate-related measures, also puts pressure on California's top air regulator to adopt a stronger draft of the state's emissions reduction scoping plan by the end of 2022.

The governor's spate of victories comes about a month after an 11th-hour legislative push he initiated. The Legislature passed all but one of his original objectives.

The laws are expected to create 4 million jobs and save the state \$23 billion from air pollution damages expenses, according to a release from the governor's office. They're estimated to cut air pollution by 60%, state oil consumption by 91%, fossil fuel use in buildings and transportation by 92%, and refinery pollution by 94%, the statement added.

Top Priorities Passed

The state's 2045 carbon neutrality goal will be legally binding under A.B. 1279. 90% of electricity will have to be from renewables by 2035, and 100% by 2045, under S.B. 1020.

The state's air regulator, the California Air Resources Board, is charged with developing environmental standards and a streamlined permitting process for carbon capture projects in S.B. 905. Carbon capture technologies used to continue fossil fuel use and enhanced oil recovery will both be banned in S.B. 1314. Natural carbon sequestration will be promoted in A.B. 1757.

And new oil and gas wells would have to be built at least 3,200 feet away from schools and homes under a setback requirement passed in S.B. 1137.

Newsom helped shepherd the bills to passage. The carbon neutrality and drilling setback measures in previous legislative sessions had been introduced and failed without his support.

"The only real time that that we've been able to pass these policies is with real leadership and climate courage, which is the thing that we keep asking for it," said Melissa Romero, senior legislative director for California Environmental Voters. "We need our leaders to show climate courage, and they did."

One key goal was absent from his desk—accelerating California's greenhouse gas reduction targets in the state's scoping plan. The bill, A.B. 2133, would have required the California Air Resources Board to create a pathway to lower emissions by 55% in 2030, but fell three votes shy of passage in the 80-member Assembly.

Scoping Plan Changes

Facing calls to adopt a stronger plan from environmental advocates and elected officials, notably from Newsom himself, the California Air Resources Board proposed numerous changes to strengthen its draft scoping plan.

Under recent revisions, the state would ban new natural gas plants and delay the use of carbon capture and storage in agency modeling until 2028 because of uncertainty about feasibility. The proposal improves language to increase the safety of carbon capture pipelines and injection sites.

The board also set an updated target to remove 20 million metric tons of carbon in 2030, and 100 million in 2045, with a focus of removal by methods that rely on natural and working lands first.

It also would set a stronger offshore wind target of 20 gigawatts by 2045. For comparison, the Biden administration's nationwide goal is to generate 30 gigawatts of energy from offshore wind by 2030.

The state also plans to create a Community Vulnerability Metric to quantify climate change's impacts for communities near industrial sites and show the different impacts of climate change. It seeks to outline household impacts by income level and race.

In an electrification building push, the state included a goal that would put the state on a path to have 3 million all-electric-ready residences by 2030 and 7 million by 2035. It also aims to deploy 6 million heat pumps by 2030.

And to cut down on transportation emissions, the proposal would increase the stringency of the state's low-carbon fuel standard, promote stronger vehicle miles travel reductions strategies, and set an aviation clean fuel target of 20% non-combustion energy use in 2045, compared to an original 10%.

To contact the reporter on this story: Zach Bright at zbright@bloombergindustry.com

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Renee Schoof at rschoof@bloombergindustry.com

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