

Saturday, October 25, 2008

## **Emissions plan needs full debate**

**Reducing greenhouse gases in state will be difficult, but we must make the effort.**

California took the next step in an ambitious plan to drastically reduce its production of greenhouse gases when the state air board released a draft plan recently. It will take several years to work out the details of the plan, but it's something Californians should begin thinking about right now.

The new rules that eventually emerge from the planning process will touch virtually every part of our lives, from the way our cities are planned, to the sort of transportation choices we have, to the jobs that will employ future generations.

The larger goal of the California Air Resources Board's so-called "scoping plan" is to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions – those blamed for the shrinking of the protective ozone layer – to 1990 levels by 2020. Along the way, it's expected that new technologies will spawn new jobs – so-called "green jobs" – and that reduced emissions will lead to other savings in energy costs, improved air quality and concomitant improvements in the health of the state's residents.

The magnitude of this effort can't be overstated. It amounts to reducing annual greenhouse gas emissions by a whopping 4 tons per person. That will call for a massive shift from using fossil fuels to renewable, non-polluting energy sources. That means new, cleaner vehicles. It means whole new industries to produce cleaner energy.

It also means imposing a cap-and-trade system to allow larger polluters such as oil companies and power plants to purchase offsetting pollution credits to balance their own production of pollutants. It's a controversial plan that is sure to be at the center of the coming debate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most environmentalists hailed the plan, though many would like to see even higher standards and tougher limits on pollution. Likewise, many business and industry groups are leery of the plan, concerned that its implementation will prove too costly for the state's economy to sustain, particularly now, when times are bad.

The concerns of both groups – and all Californians – must be addressed in the months ahead. The scoping plan is the product of a lengthy process in which CARB gathered some 40,000 comments since the first draft of the coping plan was released in June. The CARB board will get the plan in December to approve, reject or revise. Once it's approved, CARB staff will begin writing the specific regulations for reducing greenhouse gases. That's when the contention will truly begin.

But that laborious process will be well worth the trouble if we end up with a set of rules that make sense for the future. We must address greenhouse gas emissions. California has taken a national and worldwide lead in that effort since the adoption of AB 32, the state's landmark Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

AB 32 imposed requirements that CARB must follow throughout this process. It must consider a wide range of factors in making the new rules, including impact on the economy, environment and public health; the reliability of energy sources; existing environmental protections; and making sure that low-income communities don't bear the brunt of the burdens.

That's a tall order, but we're confident that we can have an aggressive and effective program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while preserving and even growing the state's economy. The devil's in the details, and that's why the process bears close attention from all of us, starting right now.