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Climate Change Task Force report to Governor released

Santa Fe – In its initial series of recommendations, the interagency Climate Change Task Force convened by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham foresees more electric vehicles on New Mexico roads, solar-powered buildings in our cities and a modernized electric grid for the state of New Mexico, among other initiatives.

The ambitious report, requested by the governor in her third executive order and released Thursday, is aimed at setting the state on the path to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45 percent by 2030, as compared to 2005 levels.

Every state agency contributed to the report, which summarizes 10 months of climate change action by Lujan Grisham’s administration, describes how specific programs will work and includes new agency proposals for how the state can further cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Together, the actions put New Mexico on a path to mitigating climate change as much as possible and adapting to its effects until further mitigation is within reach.

The governor said she expected and received concrete, meaningful proposals to reduce air pollution, boost energy efficiency standards and help strategize for a sustainable future.

“I share New Mexicans’ expectation of substantive leadership on climate action, and this initial series of recommendations underscores my administration’s unwavering commitment to addressing the causes and effects of climate change,” she said.

The task force called the report “an initial suite of ambitious policies to accelerate our transition into a clean energy future.”

Accurately identifying large and small sources of air pollution is critical to climate action, and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will complete its first-ever comprehensive emissions inventory, according to the report in 2021. That data will help regulators evaluate ambient air quality and assess the effectiveness of climate change strategies.

New Mexico’s No. 1 and No. 2 greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (largely from coal-fired power plants and the transportation sector) and methane (largely from venting and flaring in oil and gas production). The report notes that CO₂ emissions dropped when two units of the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station closed at the end of 2017, and they will drop further if the remaining units close in 2023 as planned.

Updating residential building codes to require better energy efficiency would eliminate almost 25,000 tons of CO₂ statewide annually and save the average homebuyer almost \$6,400 over the life of a home despite modest increases in construction cost, the report said.

Two state agencies, the Environment Department and the New Mexico Department of Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources (EMNRD), are working on an enforceable regulatory framework to control methane emissions, which the federal Environmental Protection Agency calls 25 times more potent than CO₂. A draft technical report on that effort is due for public review and comment by Dec. 20, according to the climate report.

To reduce carbon emissions from vehicle tailpipes, the report outlines plans to incentivize purchases of cleaner vehicles, invest in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, and require a percentage of vehicles sold to be zero-emission. NMED and the Public Education Department are also working to pilot adoption of electric school buses in multiple districts around the state.

The state is leading by example: A \$2.5 million appropriation this year to the General Services Department will increase the state's electric vehicle fleet from one to 30 and provide for investments in charging stations, the report noted.

Agency heads were asked to contribute ideas for climate action. The General Services Department, with technical support from EMNRD, is installing solar panels in 19 state buildings in Santa Fe. The \$32 million State Buildings Green Energy Project will make those buildings substantially carbon free while cutting the state's utility bills in half, the report said.

Other agency initiatives include:

- Creating a multi-agency Electric Vehicle Climate Action Team to increase electric vehicle market penetration;
- Using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's framework to evaluate possible health impacts of climate change and how we can adapt;
- Prioritizing climate-focused forest and grassland management to bolster natural resource resilience and carbon sequestration.

"We applaud the thoughtful suggestions and hard work put into this process by every state agency," said Sarah Cottrell Propst, EMNRD secretary and co-chair of the task force. "The ideas proposed and efforts already under way will substantially reduce New Mexico's climate pollution."

"Leaders of our state agencies are addressing the climate change crisis through clear and decisive action," said James Kenney, NMED secretary and the other co-chair. "While New Mexico is leading by example, federal climate protections are eroding, making our efforts even more imperative."

The task force was formed under the governor's Jan. 29 executive order, which directed state agencies to develop a statewide climate strategy and incorporate climate mitigation and adaptation practices into agency programs and operations.

The Task Force will continue to meet to consider and evaluate strategies for reducing greenhouse emissions and preparing for impacts to New Mexico. The next annual report is due in the fall of 2020.

The full report is available at <https://www.climateaction.state.nm.us/>

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