

California Approves Goal to Double Green Energy

NICK CAHILL March 26, 2020



(CN) – Calling for a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, California regulators on Thursday approved rules meant to shutter gas-fired power plants and force electrical companies to further embrace climate-friendly sources like solar and wind.

The California Public Utilities Commission cast the plan as a critical component of the state’s ambitious quest to source 100% of its electricity from zero-carbon resources by 2045 and left open the potential for a stricter mandate in the near future. If the mark is met, the commission claims it would be comparable to removing the annual emissions of 12.5 million cars.

By unanimous vote, the commission set a 2030 emissions target of 46 million metric tons for the electric sector and ordered individual utilities to submit blueprints for meeting a potential stricter cap of 38 million.

The new target requires the sector to cut emissions by 26% compared to its 2017 total and 56% below the amount measured in 2000, and the

commission cast the framework as both affordable and a way to add resiliency to the state’s grid.

While the commission says the framework will force utilities to do things like add battery storage and increase capacity to store new renewable energy, it approved a much less stringent cap than was requested by state environmentalists.

Groups like the Sierra Club and California Environmental Justice Alliance called for the commission to set a target of 30 million metric tons. They argued the commission used “narrow resource modeling” and didn’t fully consider the amount of clean energy resources available to utilities when it landed on the 46 million mark.

Last week the groups sent Governor Gavin Newsom a letter asking him to get involved and push the commission to reconsider.

“California’s role as a clean energy leader will be tarnished if we do not get this right,” they warn. “We ask you to convey this message to the commission and urge them to correct the proposed decision.”

Luis Amezcua of the Sierra Club thanked the commission for ultimately closing the door on new gas-fired projects, but said it “must go beyond business as usual” and re-evaluate the emissions total.

“For California to meet its clean energy and air quality commitments, the Commission must step up and lead by accelerating the deployment of new clean energy resources, energy storage projects, and power infrastructure upgrades,” Amezcua said in a statement. “Anything less is a missed opportunity for reducing our dependence on gas, creating good paying jobs, and safeguarding affordability and reliability.”

Meanwhile, the California Environmental Justice Alliance said it will continue pushing for stricter targets and fighting for the low-income and minority communities living near gas-fired power plants.

“As the current health crisis has made painfully clear, the failure to act on the recommendations of community members and scientists alike will only force the state to take drastic actions at a later date. In the months to come, we will continue to fight for the commission to adopt the emissions targets that science demands and California residents deserve,” said Jose Torres, alliance director.

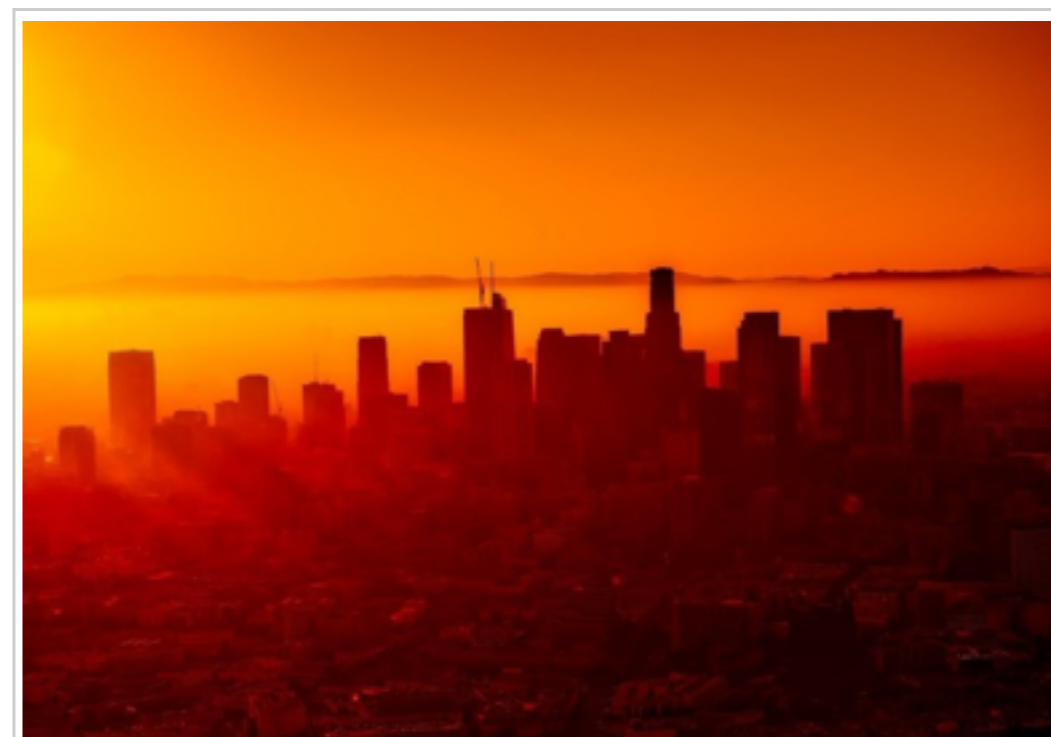
California’s greenhouse gas emissions spiked in 2004 at 493 million metric tons, prompting state lawmakers to write and pass sweeping legislation.

Hailed as a worldwide model for climate change policy, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 – signed by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican – required the state to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. The state has since upped the ante to 40% from 1990 levels by the end of the decade, along with the 100% renewable energy goal by 2045.

The latest emissions trends report found that California was on pace to meet the 2020 goal and that in 2017 it attained 52% of its electricity from solar, wind, hydropower and nuclear sources. The transportation industry is the largest polluter in the state at 40% of total emissions, followed by oil and gas refineries (21%) and electric power production (14.7%).

Along with the reduction target, the commission predicts the plan will usher in the production of roughly eight times the battery capacity installed nationwide as of 2018. Under Thursday’s framework, utilities will have to submit plans based on both 46 million and 38 million targets.

“The decision adopted today provides guidance to load-serving entities to go out and procure approximately double the amount of renewable and storage capacity that is currently online in the electric system in California,” said CPUC Commissioner Liane Randolph.



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