

Builders, environmentalists split on decision on emissions reductions

Teresa Rochester, Ventura County Star, 9-3-10

While building industry officials hailed a decision by the Southern California Association of Governments setting recommended greenhouse emissions reductions, environmentalists said the association could have done more.

Association members, who represent 189 cities and six counties, adopted targets to reduce emissions by 6 percent in 2020 and 8 percent in 2035 at a meeting Thursday in Los Angeles.

The proposed targets will be forwarded to the California Air Resources Board, which has the authority to sign off on them or assign alternative targets.

The Air Resources Board had recently recommended Southern California set its targets at 8 percent for 2020 and 13 percent by 2035. SCAG staff has also recommended those numbers to the association's board.

"Everybody wants to meet the higher number," said SCAG Second Vice President Glen Becerra. "In our heart of hearts if we had certainty that we could do that without wiping out an already fragile economy we would do that. But no one could give us that certainty. They could only say it's worth trying."

Becerra also is a Simi Valley councilman.

The greenhouse emission reduction targets are tied to state legislation, called SB 375, which mandated the creation of regional plans to reduce emissions caused by vehicles throughout California, according to SCAG's website.

Building industry executives said the higher reduction targets would endanger the economy and impose draconian measures, such as a vehicle mileage tax. Rich Lambros, chief executive officer of the Building Industry Association of Southern California, said the organization argued for a 5 percent reduction, which he said would equate to a 20 million-metric-ton reduction in greenhouse gases.

"These targets have meaning," Lambros said. "They have impact."

Amanda Eaken, California Transportation Planning Director of the National Resources Defense Council, said the environmental organization agreed with the higher targets proposed by the Air Resources Board and the association staff.

Eaken said households would save \$3,600 on average if the higher targets were adopted because it would lead to greater transportation options.

"SCAG should be able to adopt stronger targets that are more in line with the state's other three large regions," Eaken said. "And we still believe that SCAG can do more to address air pollution and reduce asthma."