

With seas rising, Calif. will start collecting data on who's prepared

Anne C. Mulkern, Environment & Energy Publishing, 9-23-14

California will now start tracking whether airports, utilities, water agencies and others are planning for future sea-level rise, under legislation Gov. Jerry Brown (D) has signed.

Brown on Sunday approved A.B. 2516, which directs the creation of the Sea Level Rise Database. The bill, from Assemblyman Richard Gordon (D), requires a number of state government departments, commissions, local planning agencies and others to file any reports they have generated on risks from higher waters. They also must include any planned defenses.

"There is no community that touches the sea that will not be impacted," Gordon said in a statement. "Critical infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, schools, emergency facilities, waste water treatment plants, power plants and airports, including the San Francisco International Airport, are all vulnerable to sea-level rise. The cost of ignoring this issue is too great."

Brown signed the bill as he prepared to speak yesterday at the U.N. Climate Summit in New York. He noted the climate measures he had signed as he issued an advance statement.

"We know in California that carbon pollution kills, it undermines our environment, and, long-term, it's an economic loser," Brown said in a video message before the summit. "We face an existential challenge with the changes in our climate. The time to act is now. The place to look is California."

Law requires reports, but not planning

Sea levels at the Golden Gate Bridge are projected to rise 4½ feet by 2100. San Francisco International Airport sits at the current level of the San Francisco Bay.

Multiple neighborhoods in San Mateo County and some well-known technology businesses in Silicon Valley lie in the path of where waters could flow. There are residential sectors already hit by flooding.

The new state database would gather information from airports, ports, and electric and natural gas utilities within the state's coastal zone or the San Francisco Bay Area. Data also would come from the state Energy Commission, Department of Transportation, Lands Commission, Water Resources Control Board, Coastal Commission and Coastal Conservancy; from regional water quality control boards; and from the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

By 2015, they would need to submit any studies, modeling, cost-benefit analyses, vulnerability assessments, adaptation appraisals or other completed work on sea-level rise. Starting in 2016, they would need to update their filings twice a year.

The measure does not force them to do any planning, but only to report what they have done. The Legislation also was amended in the Senate to add a sunset date of 2018. If it's not renewed by then, the law will no longer be in effect.

"California has produced an abundance of sea-level rise planning information, but lacks a consolidated location for this information," Gordon said. "A.B. 2516 creates an accessible centrally located tool for local and state governments to share information and coordinate their efforts, allowing us to be far more efficient in our work to address the growing threat of sea-level rise."

Solar red tape will be cut

Brown also signed other climate-related bills. They included:

- A.B. 2188, from state Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi (D), requiring California cities and counties to adopt a streamlined process for permitting residential solar. The bill targets the "red tape" permitting procedures that can differ across 500 cities and counties statewide.
- S.B. 605, from state Sen. Ricardo Lara (D), requiring the state Air Resources Board (ARB) by 2016 to develop a strategy for reducing emissions of substances like black carbon and methane that spend relatively little time in the atmosphere but are more potent contributors to global warming than carbon dioxide.
- S.B. 1275, from state Sen. Kevin de León (D). Dubbed the Charge Ahead California Initiative, it puts in place a number of levers to expand adoption of zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVs. Those include battery electric and hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles. The new law also provides incentives to increase the availability of ZEVs in low-income communities.
- S.B. 1204, also from Lara. It funds the development and the commercial deployment of zero- and near-zero-emission trucks and buses, and off-highway vehicle and equipment technologies. Brown included a signing message with his approval.

"To maximize reductions of these harmful emissions, the focus of this funding must be on transformative, advanced technology trucks and buses that can meet the objectives of [climate law] A.B. 32 by reducing emissions of both harmful criteria pollutants and greenhouse gases," Brown said. "Only vehicles that are certified to the cleanest standards and run on renewable fuels merit funding through this program."