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California creates Climate Action Registry

By **BOB KRAUTER**
East Oregonian Publishing Group

California has some of the nation's strictest environmental laws to protect air and water and it's taking the lead in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by tempting businesses to join the California Climate Action Registry.



Schwarzenegger

The state has established a Climate Action Team by executive order of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and in late September, he signed landmark legislation, Assembly Bill 32, to establish a first-in-the-world comprehensive program of regulatory and market mechanisms to achieve quantifiable, cost-effective reductions of greenhouse gases.

AB 32 requires the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to develop regulations and market mechanisms that will reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020. Mandatory caps will begin in 2012 for significant sources and ratchet down to meet the 2020 goals. A "carrot" is extended to businesses that join the Registry, an entity to create a state-recognized baseline of emissions and to encourage early actions for reductions.

"We were originally created at the initiative of a group of business leaders who came to the state and said, 'California is going to have regulation on greenhouses gases eventually and we want the state to set up a mechanism so that if we are good guys early on and we are doing all the right things the state wants us to do, that we can get some benefit out of that,' " said Joel Levinson, vice president of business development for the Registry.

As of late October, the Registry had 97 members, mostly from public utilities, manufacturing, the service sector, and local, state and federal governments. Levin said 200 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions have been registered.

"The state wanted to encourage people to take early action and give them incentives to

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do that and that was the germ behind the registry," Levin explained. "They have encouraged people very strongly to join the Registry, in fact, now it is in law in AB 32, the idea being that they would much prefer to work with people on a voluntary basis than to force them."

The California Registry is creating accounting and certification systems so businesses can quantify emissions and have a value placed on their emission reductions. Other states are participating in the program.

"We are in the process right now of setting up a multi-state registry, essentially taking what we do and expanding it to other states and we have talked to a dozen states or so," Levinson said. "The idea being that this would create a single accounting backbone for various state-level programs, whether they be mandatory or voluntary programs and when we get to the point of where states want to do trading across state lines, this will form the infrastructure for it."

So far, the Registry has few members from agriculture as Levin said, "They haven't felt like they were first in line to be regulated." The initial targets for the Registry are oil and gas companies, landfills and utilities. He expects that will change as the protocol on forestry is promoted more widely, and as new agricultural protocols on dairy and other industry segments are created.

"Pacific Gas & Electric has announced that they are going to have what they are calling a "climate protection tariff" probably starting next year," Levinson said. "It would be a voluntary program where they will charge people an extra couple of dollars a month and in order to offset the carbon in their electricity and then they will go out and buy forestry projects that are registered with us."

The first forest projects will be certified in a few months. Under the existing forestry protocol, Levinson said there are some hoops timberland owners have to jump through to participate.

"One of the big issues we struggle with, the way the protocols are written, is you have to do a conservation easement on the land, which some people in the forest industry have concerns about," Levinson said. "Others are OK with it and some aren't, but if you are committing to sequester carbon, it is not good enough to say, 'I'll do this for a few years and then I'll decide.'"

Bob Briggs, who represents the Central Coast Forest Association based near Santa Cruz, said a conservation easement could pose concern for foresters.

"I think many private foresters, especially in this area, would be troubled by a requirement for a conservation easement," Briggs said. "They would see it as a further erosion in their property rights. I have some trouble with the whole concept of global warming and blaming human activity for it. This has been going on since the Ice Age."

The registry is currently developing protocol for the state's dairy industry to reduce emissions from the livestock waste of about 2 million dairy cows. Levinson's message to major dairy farmers is their efforts curb emissions through the use of anaerobic digesters and other methods could mean greener monetary pastures.

"You may very well have a revenue opportunity here," Levinson said. "It is not clear what is going to be regulated and what is going to be voluntary offset outside the cap, but it is very possible that dairies won't be in the first group that CARB regulates but that there will be the type of things where people can do voluntary reduction projects and then sell them to regulated entities. So if you have a large dairy, you may have a new revenue stream potential."

UC Davis dairy economist Leslie Butler has been a methane digester advocate for years.

"Absolutely. I guess I have been pushing this now for 15 or 20 years. It is a way to address some of the environmental issues that the dairy industry is confronted with and generate some positive benefit for the environment," Butler said.


Entities that voluntarily participate in the California registry prior to Sunday, and have developed a greenhouse gas emissions reporting program, will not have to significantly alter their reporting or verification program later. By June 30, 2007, Levinson said CARB must publish a list of early action measures and ensure that entities get appropriate credit for their early voluntary reductions.

"The first step is to join the registry and start counting your emissions and that puts you in the position to know how to make reductions and start making money," Levinson said.

More information about the California Climate Action Registry is available at www.climateregistry.org

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