

MEETING THE CHALLENGE: GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND AB32  
by Supervisor Linda Parks, September 2008

As we watched the Olympics through the smog-filled skies of China, we were witnessing not only the outcome of years of intense training by our world's greatest athletes, but also the outcome of a building boom in China that has had global implications. The incredible pace of development in China and its far reaching spread across millions of acres to accommodate a population swelling beyond a billion people has mirrored --albeit on a larger scale-- the American expansion after World War II. The same kind of building mentality that brought us sprawling suburbs linked by ever-widening highways in the United States is being replicated in China with the same predictable outcome of polluted skies, high energy and water consumption, and loss of natural resources.

The sprawl development that exploded beginning in the 1950's is one of the reasons that California is the 15<sup>th</sup> largest emitter of greenhouse gases on the planet, with its biggest source of emissions coming from transportation. While it's true the polluted air from China reaches the shores of California, the greenhouse gas emissions from our State are also contributing to climate change that is increasingly impacting our planet. As a result, we have been given one of the biggest challenges of our generation and a plan is underway to meet that challenge.

Assembly Bill 32 which was signed into law in 2006 lays out an ambitious program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (of which CO<sub>2</sub> is most prominent). The California law looks to reduce the emissions back to 1990 levels by 2020, the equivalent of a 30% reduction over today's levels. It's a daunting task for our communities to grow and at the same time not increase our carbon footprint. It will be even more challenging to reduce that footprint. Can you imagine the State's transportation plan for highways over the next decade resulting in less emissions than we have today? Can you imagine the cities in our county meeting their housing requirements which calls for 28,000 houses by 2014, and at the same time reducing the amount of carbon emissions? Can you imagine a shopping center being built that will result in less emissions than not building it? How will we as households, as cities, as a State, reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

The California Air Resources Board is charged with implementing AB32. Through collaboration with several State agencies, a Scoping Plan to reach the 2020 goal has been produced and an extensive outreach process is underway. You can see the Draft Scoping Plan at their website: <http://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/scopingplan/document/draftscopingplan.htm>

Energy efficiency will play a significant role in achieving the 2020 goal. According to a presentation by California Energy Commissioner Art Rosenfeld, California's energy policies have already managed to hold per capita electricity use constant while the U.S. per-capita electricity use has increased by nearly 80 percent since the mid-1970's. In

addition to increasing energy efficiency, AB32 requires that utility companies have 20% of their electricity come from renewable sources by 2010, and 33% by 2020.

We know that addressing transportation is crucial. The number of miles driven in California has increased at a rate 50 percent faster than the rate of population growth for the past two decades. There are three key strategies outlined in the Scoping Plan to address this sector that accounts for 38% of California's greenhouse gas emissions. One strategy relies on technology and is based on legislation by then-Assemblymember Fran Pavley. Her AB 1493 places tough new requirements on the production of passenger vehicles to achieve the maximum feasible reduction of greenhouse gasses. Additionally, low-carbon fuel standards and reduced vehicle miles driven are also seen as necessary for making a significant dent in emissions from transportation.

California is a state known for its innovation and for setting trends. It is only fitting that the State that set the trend for urban sprawl and auto-dependency also be the State that sets the trend for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Hopefully this trend will also be mirrored by others and make California a leader in protecting our health, our nation, and our world.