

Global Warming Impacts Local Government



Local Government on the Front Line

There's a lot at stake for local governments in the fight against global warming, because they are society's first line of defense. Police, fire and emergency responders, hospitals, senior centers, emergency shelters, water and local utility districts all will bear the immediate brunt of responding to calls for help in crises linked to global warming. Increased demand for these local government services will place major new cost burdens on local governments, increasing their fiscal uncertainty, potentially impacting services to all residents, especially the poorest residents, and reducing the job security of public employees.

The Threats

In California, global warming threatens to create extreme weather patterns that will lead to floods and droughts, reduced Sierra snowpack, and more prevalent and intense wildfires. Sea level rise could make some coastal communities uninhabitable. Changing weather patterns will introduce new vegetation patterns and new disease-bearing pests.

Californians can expect direct and severe public health and environmental impacts from global warming. In California, scientists project more heat waves, resulting in increased incidents of heat stress and heat mortality. The health crisis stemming from this summer's heat wave, which killed more than 130 in California, fell squarely on the shoulders of already overburdened local governments. Higher temperatures will lead to more spare-the-air days and the accompanying increase in emergency room visits for asthma, respiratory and other health problems. Mosquito-borne illnesses and other infectious diseases will increase. Local streams and rivers will have lower flows and higher concentrations of salt, mercury, pesticides and other pollutants. Local governments, responsible for providing clean, safe drinking water to their citizens, will find potable water increasingly hard to find and more expensive, especially as California's snowpack shrinks.

Climate-sensitive industries such as tourism and agriculture will likely be among the most severely and directly affected by global warming. California may experience water, energy and food shortages. As a result, prices for water, energy, insurance, food, and health care will likely increase, perhaps dramatically. Everyone will feel the effects of global warming, but the economic burdens will be greater on low-income households and communities of color. And when people need help, they turn first to their local governments for aid.

Global Warming Facts

Think Globally Act Locally

Local governments have an important role to play: to lead their communities. Local government action to reduce global warming pollution can lead to cleaner air, healthier communities, improved quality of life, and an improved business climate.

In addition to being on the frontline with police fire and emergency services, local governments build the roads, enforce the building codes, operate the traffic and streetlights, negotiate electricity purchases, operate the recycling programs and the public transit systems, and have huge purchasing power. Government action on land use, transportation, construction, waste management, energy supply, and energy management can greatly influence the broader community's energy usage. Local energy efficiency programs can bring down utility and fuel costs so everyone in the community benefits.

Taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions often means investing in new energy efficient technologies and "clean-tech" businesses. Such investments spur economic development and new local jobs in locally produced energy products and services – and that keeps money circulating in the local economy.

The stakes are high but so, too, are the potential benefits for local government as California embarks on a new energy economy. California cannot meet its climate protection goals without the support and partnership of local governments. And local governments cannot meet the needs of their communities without strong climate leadership from state

Global Warming Action Coalition

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