



Maryland Climate Legislation Strongest in U.S.

In what regional environmental advocates called the strongest piece of legislation of its kind in the country, the Maryland General Assembly passed a bill to cut emissions 25% from 2006 levels by 2020.

The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act, SB 278 and HB 315, will protect Maryland's environment and economy while also sending a signal to the federal government to address global warming nationwide, said the Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN). Governor Martin O'Malley (D) has supported the bill and is expected to sign it in the coming weeks.

"This is a landmark moment for Maryland," said Mike Tidwell, director of CCAN. "The bill positions the state to be a leader in the fight against global warming and ensures that we're ahead of the curve as the federal government begins to contemplate action."

With the bill, Maryland joins six states in enacting a legally binding goal for emissions reductions. "It's the strongest statutory emissions reduction mandate in the country," said Tidwell, speaking to *Wind Energy Weekly*.

The bill directs the Maryland Department of the Environment to develop a plan and a timeline to achieve the goal. Tidwell said that policies already put in place during the last few years, such as the state's renewable electricity standard and a bill to cut emissions from new cars, will allow the state to reach 60% of the goal. To achieve the other 40%, the state agency has amassed a list of 42 options (e.g., reforestation, energy efficiency, etc.) used in other states from which it could choose. The plan must be in place by 2012.

Because the state does not want companies to leave Maryland for states not having climate laws, the legislation excludes manufacturing in its emissions-cutting requirements; that reality, said Tidwell, underscores the need for national climate legislation. "This sends a signal to Washington, D.C., that we need [the federal government] to act as well," he said.

Maryland has a significant interest in the nation adopting climate-change policy. With its low-lying lands and 4,000-plus miles of coastline, Maryland is considered to be among the top five states for vulnerability to global warming.

Tidwell hopes that the legislation will also build momentum within the state—particularly for wind power, which has yet to take root in Maryland, although several projects are under development and legislation was passed last year to speed up approvals. "We have enormous potential in the state," he said. "We hope the legislation will only deepen the trend toward utility wind development in the state."

Source: Wind Energy Weekly, 17 April 2009