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Governor's Office of Planning and Research Releases Blueprint for Addressing Climate Change through CEQA

Technical Advisory Shows Leadership on Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Today the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) released a technical advisory on CEQA and climate change, which provides OPR's advice on how greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions should be analyzed in California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) public agency documents for proposed projects.

"Climate change is one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time, and greenhouse gas emissions should be analyzed for their cumulative impact relative to new projects across California," said the Governor's Office of Planning and Research Director Cynthia Bryant. "This technical advisory provides a solid foundation as we begin to develop CEQA regulations that ensure the impact of climate change is accurately and fairly captured in project planning. We can rebuild California's infrastructure and grow our economy while at the same time reducing the state's carbon footprint."

Last year, the Governor signed SB 97 by Senator Bob Dutton (R-Rancho Cucamonga). The bill's purpose is to advance a coordinated policy for reducing GHG emissions by directing OPR and the Resources Agency to develop CEQA guidelines on how state and local agencies should analyze, and when necessary, mitigate GHG emissions.

OPR's technical advisory, developed in consultation with the Resources Agency, Cal/EPA and the Air Resources Board, is the first step and provides a blueprint that public agencies can use to address GHG emissions within the existing requirements of the CEQA statutes and guidelines. It also identifies available information and tools that public agencies can use to calculate GHG emissions, analyze the environmental impacts and mitigate the project's impacts on climate change. It also includes examples of GHG emission reduction measures that have been employed by some public agencies. The technical advisory provides impartial guidance and does not create a legal or administrative process, nor does it generate new requirements.

With OPR's technical advisory completed, the next phase of this process is the development of CEQA Guideline Amendments to guide public agencies on how to analyze the impacts of GHG emissions generated by new projects on the environment. This will provide some measure of predictability for those public agencies that are

concerned about legal challenges and contribute to the statewide goal to reduce GHG emissions to 1990 levels.

OPR has until July 1, 2009 to submit proposed draft CEQA Guideline Amendments to the Resources Agency. The Resources Agency will then take the draft CEQA Guideline Amendments through a formal rulemaking process and adopt them as state regulation by January 1, 2010.

OPR has also asked the Air Resources Board's technical staff to recommend a method for setting a statewide "threshold of significance" for GHG emissions, which will bring consistency and uniformity to the CEQA analysis of GHG emissions.

For more information on the OPR process for developing CEQA guidelines and additional tools for public agencies, go to www.opr.ca.gov.

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