



AB32: Energy Retrofits for Low-Income Households

By Tara Marchant

California's Global Warming Solutions Act (AB32) aims to reduce carbon emissions by 30 percent, bringing them back down to 1990 levels by 2020.

The California Air Resources Board (CARB), an 11-member body appointed by the governor, is the lead agency for implementing the legislation. After Gov. Schwarzenegger signed the bill in 2006, CARB spent two years working on a "Scoping Plan" that details the means for meeting the measure's ambitious emissions-reduction targets. The recommendations in the plan will be fashioned into regulations subject to the agency's usual rule-making process.

CARB focused on market-based mechanisms, explaining that "The development of a California cap-and-trade program that links with other Western Climate Initiative partner programs to create a regional market system is a central feature of the overall recommendation."¹ But its plan also included recommendations for green buildings, which opens the door to local projects that can increase social equity as well as reduce emissions. These projects will be competing

against those that benefit larger, better-funded stakeholders—with decisions made by an agency that is not readily held accountable to diverse communities.

If present usage patterns continue, California will emit 596 million metric tons of carbon by 2020. To meet its AB32 targets, the state will have to reduce its emissions by 174 million metric tons of carbon.

CARB compiles a "Greenhouse Gas Inventory," pooling data from several sources to determine how many tons of the main greenhouse gases are emitted by various economic sectors and activities.² One million metric tons of carbon is the equivalent of 193,000 households' average electricity use. It is also the equivalent of replacing 1.5 million energy inefficient (non-Energy Star) refrigerators or eliminating 216,000 passenger automobiles from road use for one year.

Energy retrofits on 335,000 low-income households could also cut one million metric tons of carbon, according to the Greenlining Institute. The Institute used carbon calculators available online through Home Energy Saver of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, PG&E, Energy Star, and the EPA, to gauge the impact of weatherizing

homes and upgrading appliances to energy-efficient models.³

Pulling in private investors, federal and state subsidies, local non-profits, minority contractors, utility auditors, and other important stakeholders, an effort to retrofit 335,000 homes would not only boost the local economies, but provide valued training and certification skills, energy savings, and health co-benefits. It could produce jobs and build green assets for the community. A small subset of the retrofits could be monitored several years later to verify the retrofitting impact and gain insights for strengthening the process.

Demanding economic set-asides for communities burdened by pollution and climate change is gaining traction. A targeted weatherization program can help reduce both greenhouse gas emissions, and inequality at the same time. ■

Endnotes

1. California Air Resources Board, "Climate Change Scoping Plan: A Framework for Change," December 2008.
2. See www.arb.ca.gov/cc/inventory/inventory.htm for details.
3. Marchant, Tara and Bukirin, Zara. "Greening our Neighborhoods," Summer Associates' project for the Greenlining Institute, August 2009.

Tara Marchant is a program manager at the Greenlining Institute.

Photo:

Installing insulation is part of the energy retrofitting process.

Courtesy of the DOE, Karen Doherty, Ohio Department of Development

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This issue is dedicated to Luke W. Cole (1962-2009)

Founding co-editor of the journal *Race Poverty & the Environment* and founder of the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment.



Photos: (Above) Montage from the Luke Cole memorial booklet published October 25, 2009. Courtesy of Nancy Shelby.

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(Inside Front) Richmond refinery. ©2008 Scott Braley. (Inside Back) Urban garden in Havana Cuba. © John and Faith Morgan / www.powerofcommunity.com.

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