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# California unveils plan to reach carbon neutrality by 2045



Wind turbines in the Tehachapi Mountains. The California Air Resources Board has released a plan to reach carbon neutrality by 2045. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

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California air quality officials released a bold climate plan Wednesday that outlines in broad strokes how the state intends to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the end of the decade and eventually eliminate its carbon footprint.

The so-called scoping plan released by the California Air Resources Board reflects Gov. Gavin Newsom's accelerated goal of curtailing planet-warming emissions by 48% (compared to 1990 levels) this decade. State law requires that California's emissions be reduced at least 40% by 2030 and 85% by 2045 — at which point any emissions from human activity would be offset by natural ecosystems and other solutions.

After months of public meetings and policymaker discussions, this finalized plan gives the clearest picture yet as to how the world's fourth-largest economy can meet its ambitious climate targets while maintaining economic growth and accommodating a larger population.

By 2045, the plan envisions a thirtyfold increase in zero-emission vehicles and four times the amount of power generation from wind and solar energy. It involves consumer demand for petroleum and natural gas dropping 86% in the next 23 years.

To curtail wildfire emissions, the plan calls for 1 million acres of forests, shrubland, grassland and other habitat to be treated with techniques such as prescribed burning by 2025. That figure rises to 2.3 million acres by 2045. Federal and state managers currently treat about 100,000 acres a year. This would reduce wildfire emissions by 10% compared to a business-as-usual scenario, officials said.

The publication of the state-mandated climate plan lays out an all-important, albeit nonbinding, roadmap to take concrete action during what is considered the most pivotal decade in the fight against global warming. It will be incumbent on lawmakers and government agencies to pass legislation, establish regulations and earmark funding for climate initiatives that achieve these targets. And the state will need the cooperation of private industry and Californians.

If enacted, state policymakers hope to avert some of the most dire effects of global warming in a state that's been devastated in recent years by unprecedented drought, historic wildfire seasons and record heat waves.

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“Everyone in California has experienced firsthand the impacts of climate change,” said Liane Randolph, chair of the air resources board. “It may have been wildfires and smoke or drought or record-breaking heat waves. The signs are there for all to see. The climate is changing before our eyes. We need to take action to reduce the worst impacts of a changing climate. And there’s only one way to do that: break forever our dependence on fossil fuels, the harsh grip of petroleum and move as fast as we can to a clean energy economy. And that’s what this plan does.”

The plan hinges on the widespread adoption of zero-emission vehicles, either electric or hydrogen-fueled. The transportation sector, including tailpipe emissions and fuel,

accounted for 50% of the statewide greenhouse emissions in 2019. It remains the largest single source of carbon emissions in California.

A rule passed earlier this year ensured all new passenger vehicle sales in California will be zero-emission or long-range hybrid by 2035, a bid to phase out gasoline-powered cars. The air resources board is also considering a proposal that seeks to transition heavy-duty trucks by 2040.

While the adoption of electric vehicles has been promising to some, state officials also need motorists to drive less — and California has never reached any of its targets to curtail the number of miles driven. The plan assumes Californians will reduce their miles driven by 25% in 2030 and 30% by 2045.

State officials anticipate the transition to clean vehicles will lead to less oil demand and fewer emissions from refineries, the largest source of emissions within the industrial sector. The plan expects refineries and cement plants to deploy a technology called carbon capture and storage, which involves siphoning smokestack emissions and piping them underground.

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