



TO: Board of Directors, Air Pollution Control District

FROM: Larry R. Allen, Air Pollution Control Officer

DATE: May 14, 2008

SUBJECT: Report on Results of Public Opinion Survey on Air Quality, Climate Change and Land Use Issues

SUMMARY

In November 2007 your Board approved an update to the APCD's Strategic Action Plan to ensure District efforts are appropriately prioritized and applied to programs and actions that produce results that matter relative to our mission, mandates and stakeholders. Included in this plan are strategies and tactics to increase public awareness on air quality and global climate change. In order to gain a better understanding of the knowledge and attitudes of SLO County residents, a survey was designed to measure public awareness and commitment to individual actions on air quality and climate change. This Board agenda items presents the results of the recently conducted Public Opinion Survey.

RECOMMENDATION

That your Board receive and file the information provided.

DISCUSSION

In 2005, the APCD Board adopted a Climate Protection Plan containing several strategies designed to reduce greenhouse gases throughout SLO County. State mandates to address climate change were enacted the following year with the adoption of Assembly Bill 32, California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. In addition, a number of other new mandates related to air quality and climate change have been adopted by the State in recent years. Historically, most of the air pollution programs in SLO County and throughout the state have focused on reducing ozone forming pollutants and toxic emissions.

The APCD has a Strategic Action Plan that helps to identify top goals, objectives and implementation tactics to ensure resources are best utilized to carry out our mission, and preserve air quality throughout SLO County. Included in the 2007 update to the Strategic Action Plan are two specific measures regarding the need to build an informed public and increase awareness on global climate change. A public opinion survey was identified as an effective means to gain a baseline understanding of how residents view air quality, climate change, and individual actions that can reduce our impacts.

The APCD consolidated survey efforts with the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments to reduce survey costs and gain insight on a broader range of topics, including transportation and

land use. This partnership allowed for a 50% increase of sample size, which improved the subregional validity of the survey and secured a 95% confidence level for data accuracy. Opinion Studies was hired for their experience in developing and conducting quality, unbiased, statistically valid surveys throughout SLO County.

In January 2008, a scientifically administered phone survey produced 601 interviews with residents countywide. In addition, interested individuals were able to participate in the survey via website or mail-in response, resulting in 1,335 additional “volunteered” responses. While the telephone survey of 601 county residents provides the most reliable and statistically valid data in terms of countywide and sub-regional analysis, the “volunteer” sample provides the additional insights into respondent perspectives, especially the more proactive residents of the region.

The Public Opinion Survey report provides detailed information on the responses from the phone and “volunteer” survey, and evaluates the data on a sub-regional and countywide basis. The report and associated appendices can be found at www.slocleanair.org/community/survey.asp. Some key findings from the survey related to air quality, climate change, energy use and land use are listed below:

Attitudes Toward Air Quality and Climate Change

- County residents are more concerned about local air quality than they are about climate change. Moreover, the percentage of people who said they have ‘no’ concern for climate change far exceeds those who said they have ‘no’ concern for protecting air quality. North County residents are less concerned about both air quality and climate change issues than are residents of other regions.
- About one fourth of residents say they are ‘very’ knowledgeable about ways to reduce their impact on air quality and climate change.
- Approximately one third of all residents have made ‘a lot’ of lifestyle changes to reduce their impact on air quality and climate change. Another third have made some changes while the remaining third have made a few or no changes.
- Messages that encourage residents to ‘buy locally grown produce or manufactured items’ and/or to ‘combine errands into one trip’ are likely to influence the greatest number of people; least effective are statements about ‘reducing car use’.

Attitudes Toward Alternative Sources of Energy

- Ninety-four percent of respondents support the idea of government agencies working to provide more energy through renewable sources. Two-thirds of respondents would support such efforts even with a 5% increase over current costs.

Land Use Issues

- Respondents support development in urban areas more than they do in rural areas. Eighty to eighty-five percent support development that provides single family homes or condominiums in urban areas.

- Seventy-eight percent support the idea of planning communities that make it easier to get around by bus, biking or walking rather than planning communities that accommodate cars.
- Rural development is the planning issue with the least consensus among respondents. Fifty-four percent indicated they would like planners to discourage rural development while 46% would like to allow such developments. North County respondents, followed by South County respondents, were generally more in support of rural development than were respondents the central and coastal regions.

Two focus groups with North County residents were conducted on Monday, May 5 to gain a better understanding of their knowledge and perspectives regarding air quality and climate change. Additional discussion topics included efforts to preserve agricultural and open space lands and how this related to rural development. Results from the focus groups will be discussed at the Board meeting during the staff presentation on this agenda item.

The information gathered through the telephone survey, “volunteer” survey and focus groups will assist the District in further refining and implementing our 2008 Outreach Plan and in the development and implementation of programs that target reductions in air pollution and/or greenhouse gases. In addition to APCD specific programs, the land use, transportation and renewable energy information will be used in working with sister agencies and community coalitions to promote and facilitate smart growth, alternative transportation, and sustainable energy use and production.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

To maximize resources, the District combined efforts with the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments to implement a statistically valid, countywide survey on public concerns and perspectives on transportation, land use and air quality. No other agencies were involved in developing the survey or drafting the report.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Expenditures for the public opinion survey described above are within the funds allocated for this purpose by your Board as part of the annual budget adoption in July. There are no additional financial impacts of this item.