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County discusses ways to be green

■ Transportation estimated to be area's biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions

By Chris Metinko
STAFF WRITER

Elected officials from around Alameda County gathered in San Leandro on Friday to discuss how the county can reduce its greenhouse gas emissions — despite harsh economic times — and create a “greener” future to ward off permanent climate change.

“If, in fact, we don’t find time to clean up our environments,” county Supervisor Keith Carson said, “then

we are not handing over to the next generation a place of improvement, but rather a place that has been forecast by many to be a place of doom.”

Carson was one of the organizers of the Alameda County and Cities Climate Forum, a daylong event that gave more than 150 officials and staff members from the county and 14 of its cities an opportunity to plan collaborative action against global climate change.

Those officials joined representatives of regional and state agencies in discussing energy efficiency, land use, transportation, waste reduction and other topics.

Coinciding with the forum was

the release of countywide estimates of greenhouse gas emission sources. The estimates show that transportation is the largest contributor to the county’s carbon footprint, making up more than half of the emissions.

“Working with local and state agencies to address transportation issues in this region is vital to the long-term health and economic well being of our residents,” said Supervisor Scott Haggerty, who is also vice chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Also adding to the county’s emissions are energy use at commercial and industrial facilities and residential sites, and emissions from waste

sent to area landfills.

While the county’s job is nowhere near complete, it has been on the right track for years, Carson said.

“Alameda County has been on this road of sustainability for a while now,” he said.

Carson pointed to several steps that the county and city governments have taken, such as building large “green” building projects like the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center, committing to solar and fuel-cell energy programs and building fleets of hybrid and biodiesel vehicles.

In 2007, Alameda County was one of only 12 charter members of the Cool Counties initiative formed

in conjunction with the Sierra Club. The program is an effort by counties nationwide to reduce local emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

Carson said he hoped the San Leandro forum would help local leaders exchange ideas on how to make the county and its cities even more eco-friendly.

“We know our current land use is not working,” he said. “We know the way we are using our energy is extremely wasteful. But old habits die hard.”

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