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POWERLIGHT EMPLOYEES Rene Solari and Tyroan Hardy install a solar panel on the roof of Santa Rita Jail in Dublin in 2001, one of several green projects initiated by Alameda County.

Alameda County takes the lead in a grass-roots green initiative

■ New group takes on a hot topic by asking counties nationwide to cut warming emissions 80 percent by 2050

By Chris Metinko
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Environmental consciousness is nothing new to the East Bay — think the ban in Berkeley and Oakland on polystyrene foam — but now Alameda County officials want the whole county to go green, and soon the whole nation.

In July, Alameda County became one of 12 charter members launching the Cool Counties ini-

tiative in conjunction with the Sierra Club. It is a program designed to combat global warming by asking counties nationwide to reduce warming emissions 80 percent by 2050.

Counties also will try to apply pressure to urge the federal government to adopt legislation requiring an 80 percent emissions reduction by 2050 and raising fuel economy standards to 35 miles per gallon within a decade.

“The federal government is doing nothing right now on this issue,” said Scott Haggerty, president of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. “That’s

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why we need a grass-roots effort like this. We need counties and cities to come together and get the federal government to do something.”

The 12 founding counties in the new green initiative are among the largest in the country — with more than 17 million people across 10 states living in those counties — including King County in Washington, Fairfax and Arlington counties in Virginia, Nassau in New York, Montgomery and Queen Anne in Maryland, Miami-Dade in Florida, Cook in Illinois, Shelby in Tennessee, Hennepin in Minnesota and Dane in Wisconsin.

That Alameda County was asked to join the initial list was no accident.

The county already has a handful of projects under way to cut its carbon footprint: County facilities are conserving \$6 million of energy a year and generating on-site power through 3.1 megawatts of solar installations and a 1-megawatt fuel cell at Santa Rita Jail in Dublin.

The county also has two different types of hybrid cars in its fleet and one car powered by vegetable oil. In addition, it has started the Alameda County Climate Protection Project, a cam-



DAN HONDA/TIMES FILE

ROBERT JACKSON of PowerLight installs a solar panel at Santa Rita Jail in Dublin in 2001.

paign the county's cities can join in an effort to cut emissions.

“Alameda County has been one of the true leaders in this movement,” said Jim Lopez, deputy chief of staff in King County, Wash., which is credited with helping jump-start the Cool Counties program.

Haggerty said counties and local governments have to set an example, especially considering it is those bodies that set rules

for others.

“If we're going to make businesses follow certain regulations, government also has to watch what it's doing,” Haggerty said. “That's only fair.”

Haggerty added that despite slower revenue growth and rising costs for county programs, initiatives such as the Cool Counties program are too important to delay.

“It's not always about the

ONLINE RESOURCES

For details on the Cool Counties initiative, visit www.kingcounty.gov/exec/cool-counties.

For details on Alameda County solar and fuel cell projects, visit www.acgov.org/gsa/energy.htm.

money,” said Haggerty, pointing to the \$6.1 million fuel cell project. “This board (of supervisors) has always been extremely supportive of issues such as this. It's up to us, local government and even the state to show we are willing to put our money where our mouth is.”

Alameda County officials would like to see their counterparts in other counties do the same. On Tuesday, the board voted unanimously to adopt the Cool Counties Climate Stabilization Declaration and urged all other counties in the state to join the new initiative to combat rising world temperatures. Haggerty said he already has been in contact with other counties.

Laura Garcia Darensburg with Contra Costa County said that although that county has yet to enter the Cool Counties campaign, it has joined the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, a group of govern-

ments committed to environmentally friendly development and the study of greenhouse gas emissions.

Haggerty said he is hopeful a majority of California counties will join by the time the California State Association of Counties meeting is hosted by Alameda County in November.

That could happen if similar programs in the past are an indication. The Sierra Club's Cool Cities program, working in conjunction with Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, has been encouraging cities to sign on to the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Nearly 600 cities have signed on to that pact so far, including Albany, El Cerrito, Lafayette and Richmond in Contra Costa County and Berkeley, Dublin, Fremont, Hayward, Newark, Oakland, Pleasanton and San Leandro in Alameda County.

Josh Dorner, a spokesman with the Sierra Club, said that although the Cool Counties program is a necessary outgrowth of the Cool Cities initiative, counties have more control over land use and transportation and regional planning in general.

“Cities can do a lot,” Dorner said. “But counties can do even more.”

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