

UNH News Release: Benchmark Report on NH Climate Plan Notes Progress and Challenges



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Benchmark Report on NH Climate Plan Notes Progress and Challenges

DURHAM, NH — New Hampshire reduced its energy use and emissions of heat-trapping gasses between 2005 and 2009, a new report from the NH Energy and Climate Collaborative finds. Yet despite what the report calls “real progress,” the state is challenged by rising energy expenditures and continued dependence on out-of-state energy sources.

New Hampshire’s Energy, Environmental, and Economic Development Benchmark Report was released today by the NH Energy and Climate Collaborative, a group of volunteers comprised of business and industry, non-profit, and public-sector leaders who have taken on the challenge of guiding implementation of the 67 recommendations of the 2009 New Hampshire Climate Action Plan.

The benchmark report, which evaluates baseline conditions over the period 2005-2009 and recent trends based on the broad, overarching goals recommended in the Climate Action Plan, provides a foundation upon which to track and grade future progress relative to strategies recommended in the plan.

“Development of a benchmark report is critical to evaluating the success of efforts around the state to reduce energy use and associated emissions,” says Thomas Burack, commissioner of the Department of Environmental Services and current chair of the Collaborative. “This report will help the Collaborative focus on those areas most in need of our attention and effort,” he adds.

The Climate Action Plan expresses a vision for the state’s energy, environmental, and economic development future and includes recommendations for maximizing energy efficiency, increasing use of renewable fuels, protecting natural resources, and adapting to existing impacts of our changing climate. The plan recommends a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050 while providing significant economic opportunities across the state.

Prepared under the leadership of Cameron Wake, research associate professor at the University of New Hampshire Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space, the benchmark report examines trends over the five-year period from 2005 to 2009 of 24 specific indicators across six categories: economy, jobs and emissions; efficient buildings; sustainable energy; smart growth; government leadership and action; and adaptation. Where data was available beyond 2009 (nine indicators) the report also evaluates progress.

“The report shows that our economic success and a healthy environment are closely integrated and that every sector of society can and needs to contribute to New Hampshire’s energy, environmental and economic development future,” says Wake. “While we can’t control the price of oil and gasoline, we can exert considerable influence on the amount

of money we spend on energy by improving the efficiency of energy use in buildings and in transportation networks. And we can generate jobs and grow our economy by increasing the amount of energy we produce within the state and region instead of exporting energy dollars to other regions of the country or around the globe.”

From 2005 to 2009, 67 percent of the indicators showed positive trends (e.g., emissions per unit of economic activity, clean economy jobs, renewable power, and land preservation), 25 percent showed no change (e.g., household energy expenditures, energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions from transportation), and 8 percent showed negative trends (energy expenditures, and per capita expenditure on energy for transportation). While the benchmark report shows encouraging trends up to the release of the Climate Action Plan in 2009, some limited data for more recent years indicate additional efforts will be needed to ensure positive trends continue in the future.

Some of the progress can be attributed to the fact that the state’s economy and energy use since 2005 has been influenced by two significant global trends – the increase in the price of gasoline, diesel, and heating oil that began in 2004 and the global economic recession that began in 2008. Both of these influences have served to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions across the state.

The report emphasizes that as the economy emerges from recession and global energy demand increases, key challenges remain. Energy users in the state must learn from previous actions and efforts and engage the financial resources and human capital necessary to scale up efforts to meet the energy, environmental and economic vision expressed in the Climate Action Plan.

“This report tells me we have room for improvement across the public and private sectors,” says Collaborative Steering Committee member Taylor Caswell, managing director of CleanGen Partners LLC. “In a volatile global energy market, New Hampshire must be smarter about its energy use and control its own economic and environmental destiny. Choosing to import more oil from the Middle East and South America when there are proven alternatives makes no sense. The 21st century is here and New Hampshire needs to join it.”

To view the report, visit <http://nhcollaborative.org/benchmarkreport>

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