

Environment

County tallies up its greenhouse gas emissions

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- J.L. Sousa/Register

Vehicle exhausts are one of the major sources of greenhouse gas emissions in unincorporated Napa County. A task force is studying ways to reduce emissions from a variety of sources.

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Napa County's greenhouse gas emissions tally for unincorporated areas comes to 489,933 metric tons being released annually by sources ranging from automobiles to landfills to fertilizers.

Ascent Environmental Inc. consultants calculated this tentative figure. The upcoming county climate action plan will list actions designed to take a bite out of the total to meet state greenhouse gas reduction goals.

That's when the county's evolving climate action plan will hit home. That's when wineries, farms, businesses and residents in the unincorporated areas will learn how

greenhouse gas reduction efforts will affect them. But before the carbon cutting comes the carbon counting, which is done using the approach prescribed by the U.S. Community Protocol for Accounting and Reporting of Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

“It’s an important step,” county Planning, Building and Environmental Services Director David Morrison told about 20 people at a climate change plan workshop on Wednesday in the county administration building.

Nobody goes out with a measuring device that spits out a definitive greenhouse gas emissions total. Carbon counting is about data gathering, numbers crunching, computer modeling and estimates, officials said.

In this case, the numbers apply to the unincorporated county only. Cities such as Napa and American Canyon are responsible for their own greenhouse gas reduction efforts. Ascent used data from Pacific, Gas and Electric on power use, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission on auto trips and the state on pesticide use. It looked at methane gases released by landfills resulting from local trash disposal.

The big three for unincorporated Napa County greenhouse gas emissions are:

- building energy use at 30 percent
- autos and trucks at 27 percent
- solid waste at 17 percent
- agriculture at 10 percent, with most of the emissions generated by equipment.

Carbon counting difficulties arise. For example, a certain number of people might drive each year from Sacramento to Napa. Somehow, the greenhouse gases released by these

trips must be assigned to certain communities.

of this 62-mile trip is credited to Sacramento County and half to Napa County, even though most of the mileage occurred outside Napa County.

Ascent also considered the speed of traffic when looking at auto emissions because that makes a difference in fuel use. The carbon counting effort takes into account the loss of oak woodlands and other woodlands to vineyards and development. Trees capture and hold carbon dioxide. Cut down trees and burn them and not only is the captured carbon dioxide released, but the ability of the trees to capture the carbon dioxide in the future is lost, Ascent officials said.

Someone in the audience mentioned efforts by the Napa County Resource Conservation District to plant 5,000 oaks in three years. De Kok expressed interest in learning about this project

Ascent also projected its greenhouse gas emission results into the future. De Kok said it made such assumptions as Plan Bay Area regional growth scenarios calling for more compact developments coming true.

If Napa County takes no carbon-cutting steps, its greenhouse gas emissions should fall by 26 percent by 2050, Ascent concluded. That's because of steps being taken by the state and federal governments, such as requiring more fuel-efficient buildings and vehicles and more renewable energy use.

Next, Napa County must set a greenhouse gas reduction goal. The gap between that goal and the amount of

reductions to be achieved by state and federal actions will be the target requiring local greenhouse gas reduction actions. While the county has yet to announce a reductions goal, Ascent officials said it will be in line with state targets. The state seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 and to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

A previous county climate action plan effort stalled before the Board of Supervisors in 2012. Winery and agricultural officials said their sectors were being asked to shoulder too much of the greenhouse gas-reduction burden.

Last year, Napa County revived the climate action plan effort. The Board of Supervisors approved paying Ascent Environmental Inc. \$100,000 to work on the project. The schedule calls for a draft climate action plan to be available for public review by this summer and public hearings and adoption in the fall.

For now, the greenhouse gas emission calculations remain a moving target. On Wednesday, Ascent revised numbers that had only recently been posted in a report on the county's website.

Greenhouse gases range from carbon dioxide to methane to fluorinated gases, each with different global warming potentials, an Ascent report said. Ascent converted these releases into the equivalent of one metric ton of carbon dioxide for accounting purposes.