

VT's Climate Cabinet Takes on New Challenges in 2015

Even we hearty Vermonters were amazed at the tenacity of this year's winter. Bone chilling winds and temperatures dominated our January and February days, and well into April, that spring thaw seemed like it would never arrive!



Recurring weather pattern during the winter of 2014/15

When the weather delivers a tough winter, it can be hard to stay tuned to the urgency of addressing climate change - yet the National Weather Service just announced that 2014 was the hottest year on record globally. Climate scientists are postulating that the severe cold in the northeast is part of the global climate disruption caused by warming temperatures; the Gulf Stream is shifting south, bringing cold arctic air with it.

Governor Shumlin created Vermont's Climate Cabinet to make sure that as a state, we bring our full and sustained attention to fighting climate change, even as colder than average temperatures or the crisis of the moment might tend to distract us.

The Cabinet, chaired by ANR Secretary Deb Markowitz, is composed of the heads of almost all of Vermont's state agencies including the Agency of Transportation, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Cabinet members coordinate agency actions to help reduce the state's emissions of greenhouse gases - such as carbon dioxide and methane - and to help Vermont communities build resilience to unavoidable impacts such as more severe and frequent flooding.

During 2015, the Cabinet is working to advance three priorities: leading by example with our own state agency practices and investments; supporting the development of an updated Comprehensive Energy Plan for Vermont and; increasing the number of clean electric vehicles driving on Vermont's roads.

Leading by Example

This year the Cabinet will set new energy goals for state facilities and operations, for example a specific goal to reduce energy consumption by a certain amount in the next ten years, or a goal to increase our use of renewable energy by a certain amount. To make sure we are moving ahead as we discuss longer range goals, Cabinet agencies are also working together to add new EVs to the fleet and new charging facilities at state workplaces, and to identify state properties where we can build solar energy facilities.

The Cabinet will also work this year on improving our ability to measure and track the total energy we are using, and the sources of that energy, using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's energy tracking software called Energy Star Portfolio Manager.

Updating the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan

The Cabinet's second priority is to help update the landmark 2011 plan that established Vermont's goal of getting 90% of our energy from renewable sources by 2050. That goal has helped to spur important initiatives, such as a 2014 law to increase net metering in Vermont, making it easier and more cost effective for Vermonters to generate their own electricity with roof-top solar panels, community-based solar arrays, or wind turbines.

Like the 2011 plan, the 2016 plan will address Vermont's energy future for electricity, thermal heating, transportation and land use. The Cabinet is

already hard at work developing more detailed goals for this plan to show how we will get to 90% renewable energy by 2050. The Cabinet is also considering how this plan might give greater attention to reducing our carbon pollution and meeting specific climate change goals established by Vermont's Legislature.

Growing our Electric Vehicle Fleet

The governors of eight states, including Vermont, adopted a bold goal in 2013: put 3.3 million clean electric vehicles on the roads in our states by 2025.

To drive progress toward that goal, the Climate Cabinet released its own plan to boost the regional electric vehicle (EV) market. Currently 60% of Vermont communities have EVs, a big increase from just five years ago, but the total number is still small at just over 900 registered passenger EVs state-wide.

This year, the cabinet will work on encouraging employers to increase workplace charging stations, where research by the U.S. Department of Energy and other organizations suggests it is most needed because EV users need to charge their vehicles at work. The Cabinet also plans to work with Drive Electric Vermont to increase activities that help build consumer awareness and interest in EVs, and to support Vermont state agencies and municipalities to build new accessible charging stations.

It will be a busy year for the Climate Cabinet. And despite the distraction of a colder than average winter, the urgency to act has never been greater than it is today.



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