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Ideas Generated to Make County Green

By Amy Sylvestri
San Leandro Times

Over 150 elected officials and experts came together for a forum at the San Leandro Main Library a few weeks ago to discuss the ways Alameda County can go “green” and avoid permanent climate change.

The climate forum featured presentations on everything from how to measure a carbon footprint to the economics of going green.

Carolyn Bloede, Alameda County Sustainability manager, was trained by Al Gore’s Climate Project to be a public lecturer on the topic. Over the past few years, she has led the “inventory” taking of Alameda County’s pollution and emissions.

Bloede has totaled all the fuel consumed by individuals and city governments, landfill emissions, electricity used, and other

factors — for a total of 14 million metric tons of emissions by the county last year.

Most of the emissions came from vehicles — 35 percent came from cars on highways and 22 percent from cars on local roads. In the Bay Area over all, transportation accounts for 50 percent of greenhouse gases, compared with an average of 14 percent worldwide.

Auto Emissions Blamed for Bay Area’s Carbon Footprint

According to statistics put out by the county, the per-capita carbon footprint in the Bay Area is three times the world average.

Bloede said that Alameda County is only the second county in the entire U.S. to make such an inventory, but knowing how much we are emitting is only the first step in a very long journey toward cutting down pollution.

“Individual action is what we need to focus on,” said Bloede. “How many of you drove here this morning? How many of you took a nice long, hot shower this morning?”

The crowd erupted in nervous laughter at her questions, but Bloede insisted that individual accountability was necessary to make any significant changes. She said that we can’t



PHOTO BY AMY SYLVESTRI

An audience that included Mayor Tony Santos, County Supervisor Keith Carson, Susan Muranishi, and other officials, as well as residents, turned out for the Climate Forum at the Main Library.

put all the blame on large corporations, and that we can begin reducing emissions personally.

“I wish (the emissions) were all coming from diesel trucks and large companies, but most of it is regular gasoline and we are using a lot of it,” said Bloede.

After the presentations, everyone broke into smaller groups to brainstorm ideas on how to encourage using public transportation.

The next step in reducing emissions will take place at the city level, and will include making individual city action plans and working with residents and businesses.

Though some of the numbers

seem daunting, Alameda County is on the right track, said Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson.

Alameda County is one of 12 charter members of the “Cool Counties” initiative sponsored by the Sierra Club. The program encourages each county in the nation to reduce their emissions by 80 percent over the next 40 years.

“The county is leading the Bay Area in the right direction, the Bay Area is leading California in the right direction, California is leading the country in the right direction, which will lead the world in the right direction,” said Carson.