

N.C. should step out front in efforts on climate change

October 6, 2006 12:15 am

In 2005 North Carolina lawmakers distinguished themselves by being the first state government in the Southeast to establish a commission to study global warming.

Earlier this week an expert told that panel, the Legislative Commission on Global Climate Change, that North Carolina could place itself in a better position to benefit from potential federal regulation if it began reducing greenhouse gases now, according to published reports.

Data Center a key resource for study

That advice makes extremely good sense for a state that's trying to establish itself as a leader in technological innovation and entrepreneurship. It holds special promise for Western North Carolina, which is home to the National Climatic Data Center, the nation's repository for data covering more than 150 years of observations and an invaluable resource for those studying climate change.

"The earlier that states act on climate change, the earlier they can (create an) incentive (for) their state industries and entrepreneurs to develop technologies and policies that will address climate change," Joshua Bushinsky, of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, told the commission.

Economic benefits

From an economic standpoint, it could be highly beneficial to encourage the development of new technologies that reduce energy consumption or that reduce the emissions of harmful pollutants that come from burning fossil fuel.

But the state also stands to benefit from cleaner air, greater energy independence and a redirection of resources to other, more beneficial uses than building new power plants, which both Duke Energy and Progress Energy have asked the state Utilities Commission for permission to do.

One way to reduce energy consumption and therefore the harmful emissions that cause greenhouse gases is to persuade households to use compact florescent light bulbs, which require about one-fourth the energy of a conventional bulb, Bushinsky said. Using renewable resources, such as wind or geothermal power is another.

From the coast to the mountains new developments are changing the state's landscape. Tax credits and utility programs that buy power from residential generators make building or retrofitting homes to produce some or all of their own energy from renewable, environmentally friendly sources more affordable than it has ever been before. But more incentives should be created to encourage developers to build such homes.

Tax incentives, educational campaigns and other efforts should be made to encourage homeowners to buy energy efficient appliances and the compact florescent light bulbs mentioned by Bushinsky.

When it comes to automobiles, another great source of pollution, the state should ensure that, as its fleet of vehicles is replaced, a top priority is the miles per gallon new vehicles get. It should put greater emphasis on spending transportation dollars for mass transit. And it should encourage and possibly provide tax incentives for people who buy fuel-efficient cars.

Energy consumption can be reduced without sacrificing quality of life. North Carolina can and should be a leader in making it so.
