

Survey: CAs Ethnic Minorities Want State to Act Now on Global Warming

SAN FRANCISCO—A large majority of California's adult African Americans and Latinos want the state government to start reducing greenhouse gases and emissions immediately rather than wait for the economy and the jobs picture to improve, a new statewide [survey](#) found.

With the Chevron refinery fire in Richmond the day before providing a note of urgency, the Public Policy Institute of California on Tuesday released the survey, "Californians and the Environment" at a briefing held by New America Media.

Among ethnic groups surveyed, Latinos and African Americans show the most support for immediate state action against global warming, 74 percent and 55 percent respectively, while non-Latino whites and Asians agreed at a rate of 46 percent and 45 percent respectively.

And despite economic difficulties, minority communities also show overwhelming support for the law requiring the state to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions back to 1990 levels by the year 2020. Asians, blacks and Latinos supported the emissions reduction law by 82 percent, 74 percent and 82 percent respectively, while 61 percent of non-Latino whites surveyed said they back the law.

Moreover, 42 percent of California adults believe that efforts to curb global warming will create more jobs for people around the state. Up to 63 percent of blacks and 50 percent of Asians think so.

While nearly half of all adults view air pollution as a serious health threat, ethnic minorities showed the most concern over air pollution and are most aware that the health threat is more serious in lower-income areas than in other areas.

The pressing environmental concern among minority communities comes as no surprise to Mark Baldassare, president and CEO of PPIC: "The Richmond refinery fire yesterday is a reminder of just how close we are to the issue." Roger Kim, executive director of Asian Pacific Environmental Network stresses that "the impact of pollution is very real in minority communities—they are the ones that live next to the big sources of pollution such as refineries and freeways." The PPIC survey, funded by the Hewlett Foundation, involved multilingual landline and cell phone interviews of 2,500 adults from four ethnic groups in five regions of the state from July 10 to 24. The twelfth such survey conducted by the group has a +2.9 percent margin of error.

The findings reflect the growing impact of grassroots initiatives to counteract environmental degradation. "We are trying hard to affect policy that would focus on the 'toxic triangle' of Richmond, Oakland and the Bay View (San Francisco)," reports Rev. Daniel Buford, director of the Prophetic Justice Ministry of the Allen Temple Baptist Church. "I'm also hopeful in that young people and older people are beginning to work together in community gardens and environmental preservation," adds Buford, who is also vice president of Communities for a Better Environment.

Kim reports that APEN is launching a multilingual campaign to explain the environmental issues on the ballot for this November election, in addition to mobilizing Asian communities in support of environmental legislation.

"We are promoting environmentalism as a values-based issue," says Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, president and founder of the Regeneration Project. "Through covenants, we encourage congregations to apply practical solutions such as tree-planting, using energy-saving devices, and of course we also encourage policy intervention." National Park Ranger Maria Jose

Alcantara says she reaches out to youth to promote environmental awareness through an appreciation of their parks and open spaces.

The survey shows that advocates need to better educate their communities on other environmental policy issues. While 56 percent of non-Latino whites have heard of the government's "cap and trade" policy to set limits on carbon dioxide emissions, awareness of the policy among Asians, Latinos and African Americans is below 40 percent. Meanwhile, some grassroots leaders have advised the "traditional environmental movement" to start focusing less on species and more on people, as a way to garner support for their cause.

"Unfortunately, the movement has tended to show more concern for the environment—the snail darter, for example -- rather than the people who live in it," says Buford. Kim agrees: "The demographic changes in the state demand that the environmental movement become in touch with the needs of minority and working class communities." "Keep it simple, keep it human," advises Bingham, "make it about protecting our neighbors and creation."