



King County Executive, Ron Sims

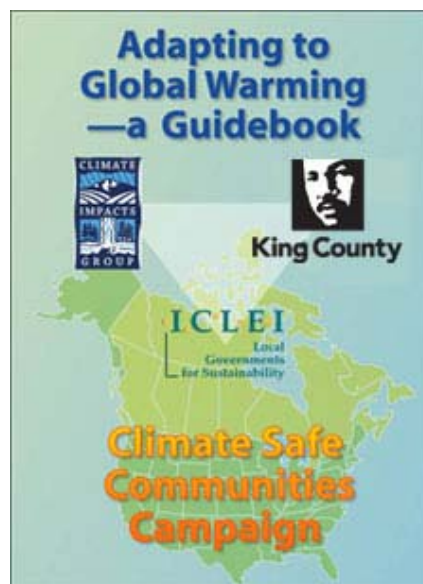
King County Executive

Joint news release from ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability U.S.A., The Climate Impacts Group and King County

April 20, 2007

Guidebook Will Help Communities Prepare for Climate Change Impacts

Peer Review Underway on Heels of IPCC Adaptation Report



Local government leaders will soon have a new tool to help them plan for the impacts of global warming, which range from drought and increased flooding to new diseases and invasive species that are harmful to humans and the environment. Peer review is about to begin on *Setting the Course: A Guidebook on Planning for Global Warming*, which is a framework that communities can use to prepare for and adapt to regional climate changes.

The guide was co-authored by the internationally distinguished Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington, King County Executive Ron Sims (in Washington State), and King County's global warming team. ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability is a contributing partner and will distribute the guidebook nationally to its 250 U.S. member cities, towns and counties. Additionally, the guide will be available to any interested government across the world. King County is considered a national model for its work on global warming.

The guidebook will become part of ICLEI's Climate Resilient Communities program, which is administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The program enables communities to integrate climate preparedness strategies into existing hazard mitigation plans, reduce the costs associated with disaster relief, and prioritize vulnerabilities such as infrastructure, zoning and water capacity.

The release comes on the heels of the international Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability," which covers climate adaptation and community resiliency. The IPCC report indicated that certain areas in the United States are already susceptible to flooding, coastal erosion, drought, heat waves, health impacts, and intense hurricanes and wildfires.

Executive Sims was initially inspired to write the guidebook with Climate Impacts Group after hosting a large conference on the regional effects of climate change in October 2005. Local leaders attending the conference and those working with ICLEI and the Climate Impacts Group have expressed the need for this type of resource to help with the new work of adaptation facing communities across the nation.

In response to this need, the guidebook is designed to take the mystery out of planning for climate impacts by specifying the practical steps and strategies that can be put into place now to build community resilience into the future. These steps include creating a global warming adaptation team; identifying community vulnerabilities to global warming; and identifying, selecting and implementing adaptation options.

"Foresight is good government; it's the essence of what we do as leaders," said Executive Sims. "The actions we take today will dramatically affect the quality of life in 2050 for our region's projected 2.5 million residents, including our children and grandchildren. I know that other regional leaders across the United States share this perspective, and I want our county's experience to help them plan for their future generations."

The guidebook features King County's approach to integrating global warming planning into its day-to-day operations. For example it is including a 15 mile reclaimed water backbone system as part of a new wastewater treatment plant, which is needed to serve population growth. New membrane technology will clean nearly all of the 36 million gallons of wastewater treated daily to such a high level, nearly 60 percent of it will eventually be available as a drought-proof water supply for agriculture and industry.

Additionally, the Executive's proposal for a countywide flood control district was just approved as the county pursues an aggressive levee improvement program in anticipation of more frequent and more severe floods due to climate change.

The county, home to 1.8 million people, 40 percent of the state's jobs and the economic engine of the Pacific Northwest, released its Climate Plan in February. The plan adopts a goal to reduce emissions by 80 percent below current levels by 2050. The plan also laid out adaptation activities in areas of water supply, wastewater treatment, floodplain management, agriculture, forestry and biodiversity. The plan is available at:
<http://www.metrokc.gov/exec/news/2007/pdf/ClimatePlan.pdf>.

The guidebook drew heavily on Climate Impacts Group's experience in researching and communicating information on climate change impacts and planning to Pacific Northwest decision makers. The Climate Impacts Group, based at the University of Washington, is one of eight regional climate assessment groups in the nation funded by NOAA.

"Communities all over the nation and the world are beginning to get serious about preparing for global warming," said Amy Snover, Assistant Director of the Center for Science in the Earth System at the University of Washington, and a lead author of the Guidebook. "Especially in the United States there is very little guidance on where to find relevant information about the impacts of global warming or how to go about preparing for them. Our guidebook will fill this gap, providing the guidance communities need for mapping their course in a changing future."

Keene, New Hampshire will be the first city to receive the guidebook, as part of a peer review process to be expanded later this month. A final version is expected this summer and will be shaped by responses from other local governments around the nation.

"More and more, local governments are effectively implementing mitigation techniques to reduce the impacts of climate change," said Michelle Wyman, Executive Director of ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability U.S.A. "Our partnership with King County, NOAA, and the Climate Impacts Group enables us to offer cities and counties a parallel set of tools that focus on climate adaptation and preparedness as we increasingly anticipate unavoidable climate change impacts on our communities."

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