

Green House: Small victories...A greener life

[EPA approves higher-ethanol gas blend for more cars](#)

[U.S., California to jointly seek higher car fuel economy](#)

Jan 23, 2011

States take lead in efforts to fight climate change

06:31 PM

Share 27

By [Wendy Koch](#), USA TODAY

58 Comments

5 Recommend

Now that 2010 has gone down as one of history's hottest years, many states are choosing not to wait for Congress to tackle global warming and are taking their own steps to slash greenhouse gas emissions.

States are increasingly adopting stricter, energy-saving building codes, spending more money (partly federal) on energy efficiency and prodding big polluters to cut heat-trapping emissions.

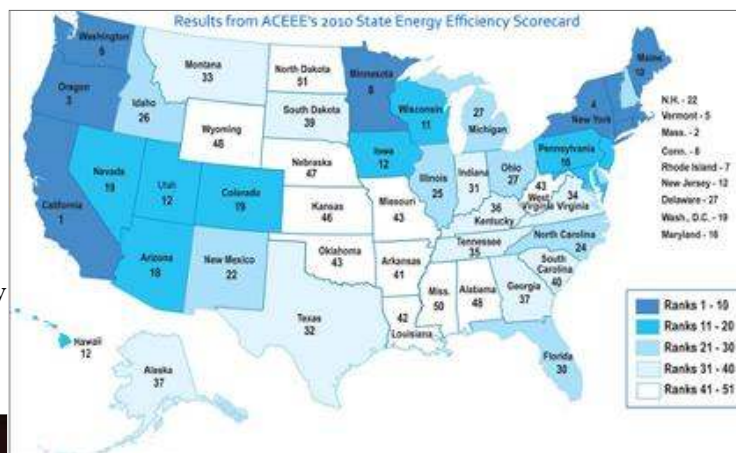
"This is ground-breaking work the states are doing to provide leadership," says Kevin Kennedy of the [California Air Resources Board](#), a state agency that approved rules in December to



CAPTION
By Todd Plitt, USA TODAY

cut the state's current carbon dioxide emissions 15% by 2020. This month, California began to require new TVs be more energy efficient, to phase out incandescent light bulbs (one year ahead of the national phase out) and to enforce a green building code for homes and businesses.

These efforts come as last year's Democratic-controlled Congress failed to approve a climate change bill and the new GOP-led House of Representatives seeks to stop the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating emissions. They also come as data released this month by the [National Climatic Data Center](#) show 2010 tied with 2005 as the world's [warmest on record](#). Records began in 1880.



CAPTION

By American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

- Follow [Green House on Twitter](#)

[States nearly doubled their spending on energy efficiency](#) between 2007 and 2009, and twice as many — now at least 20 — have proposed or adopted energy-saving building codes since 2009, according to a study in October by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, a private non-profit group.

States are acting individually and collectively:

--[Massachusetts announced last month that it will cut greenhouse gas emissions 25%](#), from 1990 levels, by 2020. "It's very doable," says Richard Sullivan, the state's secretary of energy and environmental affairs. "When you focus on energy efficiency, you can go a long way."

This year, the state will help fund ultra-efficient retrofits for some homes and give them a miles-per-gallon type efficiency label. It's working to allow auto insurers to base their rates partly on a car's annual mileage.

--Three regional groups, representing at least 22 U.S. states, agreed last year to work together on "cap and trade" programs. These programs cap total emissions but allow businesses that pollute a lot to buy emissions credits from those that pollute less.

The regional groups include the [Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Reduction Accord](#), signed by 10 governors, and the Western Climate Initiative, in which California, [New Mexico](#), British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec are slated next January to begin their own "cap and trade" program.

They're following the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#) or RGGI. Since 2009, 10 Eastern and Mid-Atlantic states have required power plants to buy allowances for emitting carbon dioxide, raising \$777 million and reinvesting 80% of the revenue in clean energy programs.

"You can reduce greenhouse gas emissions without having a significant impact on ratepayers," says Jonathan Shrag, the group's executive director, noting the average monthly bill rose 73 cents.

Yet RGGI's consumer costs will escalate in future years, when CO2 cuts are fully phased in, says David Kreutzer, an energy expert at the Heritage Foundation, a research group. He says such programs will slow economic growth and raise energy costs — arguments that helped torpedo Congress' "cap and trade" bill.

Kreutzer calls state efforts to cut greenhouses gas emissions "anemic and sporadic."

Some states, notably Texas, are bucking EPA's efforts to regulate emissions, and several new governors, including New Mexico's GOP Gov. Susana Martinez, have balked at her state participating in a "cap and trade" plan.

States, emboldened by Congress' inaction, will increasingly pick up the slack, says Dale Bryk of the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group. She predicts: "We will see a lot more action this year."

Tags:

[California](#) [Congress](#) [Texas](#) [Massachusetts](#) [U.S. House of Representatives](#) [New Mexico](#) [Environmental Protection Agency](#) [Ontario](#) [Quebec](#) [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) [Heritage Foundation](#) [British Columbia](#) [California Air Resources Board](#) [Kevin Kennedy](#) [Western Climate Initiative](#) [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#) [American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy](#)



CAPTION

By Business Wire