Activists Call on San Diego Officials to Make Climate Improvements

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A group of San Diego-based environmental activist groups released a report Monday on the city's Climate Action Plan, specifically its efficacy in low-income communities of color.

Solar panels. File photo

The Environmental Health Coalition, Center on Policy Initiatives and SanDiego350 released “Start Here, Start Now: An Environmental Justice Assessment of the City of San Diego Climate Action Plan,” which includes investigations of six facets of the Climate Action Plan and suggestions for immediate action the city could take to address the plan's shortcomings.

According to the report, the city's adopted 2018 budget does not break down how much direct and indirect funding is being used to implement the Climate Action Plan. In addition, there has been no public data released regarding how much money the city has allocated for what the report calls "environmental justice communities" since the plan was adopted at the end of 2015.

"All people deserve the right to live, work and play in a healthy and safe environment," said Carolina Martinez, the policy director for the Environmental Health Coalition. "In San Diego, disadvantaged communities are hit first and worst by the harmful impacts of climate change. They experience the largest amounts of greenhouse gas emissions and toxic pollution known to cause serious health impacts. With this baseline assessment, we are sending a loud and resounding message to the City of San Diego to start investing here in our communities and start increasing transit options now."

The report's suggestions focus on increasing direct funding and affordable, zero-emission public transit to environmental justice communities. According to the report, 90 percent of U.S. census tracts
in the City of San Diego with the worst air pollution are environmental justice communities, who also rely on public transit up to three times more than the city overall.

The EHC also calls for the city to increase tree canopy coverage, solar energy availability and the efficiency of water and energy services in environmental justice neighborhoods.

“We all live in San Diego for the chance at a better life, but my experience has been nothing short of challenging,” said Esperanza Gonzalez, a member of the City Heights community. “While I'm glad our elected officials have recognized climate change as an issue, I'm disappointed they haven't prioritized our families who are impacted the most. Through the years, the city has installed a few safety measures, but since the Climate Action Plan's adoption in 2015, we haven't seen any significant action in our communities.”

--City News Service

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