

Climate changes occurring across N.M.?

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
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As pollution from oil and natural gas aggravate respiratory conditions and worsen symptoms of COVID-19, New Mexico lawmakers are currently in the rulemaking process for methane/ozone regulations.

New Mexico political leaders hosted a webinar on Aug. 26 to discuss climate and public health issues within the state.

Topics addressed by the panel included the effects of global warming and air pollution across the state.

Pollution from oil and natural gas, according to data from the state, can “aggravate respiratory conditions and worsen symptoms of COVID-19.”

“Passage of the Energy Transition Act has put our state on a path to ensure that by 2045, the electricity grid will be 100 percent carbon-free,” New Mexico Department of Health Secretary Kathy Kunkel said.

“We are on track this year to put in place state rules to reduce methane waste and pollution from oil and gas operations. It’s important that we get this right; to reduce air pollution that disproportionately impacts the health of children, seniors, and rural communities,” she added.

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One of the top priorities, according to New Mexico Speaker of the House Brian Egolf, is to address climate changes in the legislature.

“The threat of climate change is real. We understand it to be real. We are taking it seriously,” Egolf said. “We understand the challenges, but we also understand there are opportunities presented as the state adopts strategies to adapt, to mitigate, and to produce New Mexico’s contribution to carbon emissions and climate change.”

Dr. David DuBois, a climatologist at New Mexico State University, shared climate statistics from across the state.

Data shows overall warmth during the summer months has increased at least half a degree Fahrenheit, with a .8 increase across southeast New Mexico since 1980, along with warmer temperatures during the winter, DuBois said.

Additionally, overall temperatures of the last decade were the warmest of the century. This accounts for longer growing seasons and more allergens. Less moisture during the winter is a possibility.

DuBois believes New Mexico may see reduced snowfall in the future, as well as drier soil.

The impacts to agriculture could cause stress on plants, lack of foliage during hotter and drier droughts, and the reliability of existing water sources threatened.

There are potential health effects to the general public. Data from Memorial Medical Center linking air pollutants in Las Cruces with emergency room visits shows over a 12 percent increase in cardiovascular ER visits and over a five percent increase in respiratory ER visits.

“It’s not just a big city issue, we’re seeing it in New Mexico,” DuBois said.

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Greener changes to reduce emissions in New Mexico could include expanding the wind energy sector, rooftop solar panels, using geothermal resources, and electrifying transportation that can be used with renewable energy.

“Everything from our everyday cars we use, to transit, to the transportation sector as a whole—we need to have plans that look at resilience and adaptation. We’re on our way there, but we still have quite a way to go,” DuBois said.

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