King County

King County
Administrative Policies and Procedures

Executive Orders, Policies & Procedures

Title

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Executive Order on the Evaluation of Climate Change Impacts through the State Environmental Policy Act

Department/Issuing Agency

Effective Date.

Executive Office

September 1, 2007

Approved

June 27, 2007

This Order requires and empowers King County Departments to evaluate the climate impacts of those actions being evaluated under authority of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

WHEREAS, King County Executive Order PUT 7-5 required and empowered King County Departments to employ increasingly aggressive strategies to mitigate regional contributions to global warming; and

WHEREAS, King County Executive Order PUT 7-7 required King County Departments to employ innovative environmental management as a means for the region to mitigate and adapt to global warming; and

WHEREAS, King County Executive Order PUT 7-8 required that King County Departments employ coordinated strategies of land use to mitigate and adapt to global warming; and

WHEREAS, the King County Comprehensive Plan recognizes potentially far reaching consequences to the environment and to humankind's quality of life if global climate change is not addressed effectively; and

WHEREAS, the King County Comprehensive Plan acknowledges serious local impacts of global climate change, including but not limited to: habitat degradation and deforestation from drought and fires; reductions in water for drinking, irrigation, and hydropower generation; significantly curtailed recreational activities of fishing, skiing, boating, and rafting; coastline erosion from rising sea levels; droughts and floods from more erratic weather patterns; increased ozone levels from warmer summers; an increase in heat related deaths; and greater infestation of mosquito-related disease and forest pests; and

WHEREAS, the King County Comprehensive Plan identifies King County's actions as an important factor in addressing global climate change; and

WHEREAS, King County is committed to analyzing its own programs and projects for impacts to climate change and to developing and providing measures to mitigate its actions that contribute to the causes of climate change; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with King County Council Motion 12362, King County prepared the "2007 King County Climate Plan"; and

WHEREAS, the 2007 King County Climate Plan reflects experts' predictions that climate change will result in warmer winter temperatures resulting in more precipitation falling as rain than snow, a continued snowpack decline, and an increase in winter streamflow and a decrease in summer streamflow; and

WHEREAS, the 2007 King County Climate Plan also reflects experts' projections that climate change will increase the frequency of flood events; result in greater shoreline erosion and nearshore habitat loss; alter contours of the shoreline due to rises in sea level; change the frequency, intensity and type of natural hazards faced by the Pacific Northwest; increase the frequency of drought events in the region resulting in a decline in firm yields from the region's water supply reservoirs and increase summer and fall demand for water; impact biodiversity and ecosystems; and exacerbate and create new threats to public health; and

WHEREAS, in Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency, 127 S.Ct. 1438, 75 USLW 4149, April 02, 2007 (No. 05-1120), the United States Supreme Court determined that greenhouse gases are a form of "air pollutant," and that harms associated with climate change are serious and well recognized; and

WHEREAS, SEPA rules require agencies to consider a proposal's environmental impacts when rendering a threshold determination of whether an environmental impact statement is required; and

WHEREAS, air quality and climate are identified in WAC 197-11-444(1)(b) as elements of the environment to be considered in assessing a proposal's environmental impacts under SEPA; and

WHEREAS, RCW 43.21C.010(2) declares that the purpose of SEPA, in part, is to "promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere"; and

WHEREAS, when acting as a SEPA lead agency, King County is in a unique position to require appropriate consideration of climate impacts when considering both private and public projects undergoing County review; and

WHEREAS, King County is entrusted with protecting its citizens, the environment, and economy through policies of land use, environmental management, and clean energy economic development; and

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Ron Sims, King County Executive do hereby order and direct all King County Departments, effective September 1, 2007, to require that climate impacts, including but not limited to those pertaining to greenhouse gasses, be appropriately identified and evaluated when such Departments are acting as the lead agency in reviewing the environmental impacts of private or public proposals pursuant to the State Environmental Policy Act.