

SAN MATEO COUNTY

San Mateo County's ambitious plans to improve the environment include cutting carbon emissions, designing buildings that use minimal energy, and engaging the public.

Carbon Emissions

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution in November 2005 pledging to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 10 percent by 2010. To achieve this goal, the County is retrofitting buildings with energy-efficient lighting and installing more efficient heating and cooling systems, among other steps. One building retrofit alone is projected to reduce annual electrical use by nearly 10 percent, or 179,482 kilowatt hours (kWh), and carbon dioxide by 24,338 pounds.

The County's new Youth Services Center (YSC), a \$155 million project that includes a juvenile hall, girls' camp, courts, administration, and other services, was designed with energy in mind. Opened in September 2006, the buildings feature abundant glass areas to allow natural daylight, energy-efficient windows, and a roof specially designed to reduce the need for summer cooling and winter heating.



San Mateo County's new energy-efficient Youth Services Center. Photo courtesy of San Mateo County.

In 2007, the County pledges to continue to reduce CO₂ emissions through retrofit projects at existing facilities, to increase the gas mileage of its vehicle fleet, develop a Countywide energy strategy, and help educate and inform residents, businesses, cities, and others with presentations and publications.

San Mateo County Energy Usage and Carbon Dioxide Emissions (all units in thousands)					
	Electricity (kWh)	Natural Gas (therms)	Gasoline (gallons)	Diesel (gallons)	Carbon Dioxide (tons)
1999-00	32,322	1,582	418	89	22.5
2004-05	32,034	1,522	384	72	23.3
Change	-0.9%	-3.8%	-8.1%	-19.1%	3.6%

Above is a summary of the County's energy use and the corresponding CO₂ emissions. CO₂ emissions are targeted for reduction by the Kyoto Treaty and by the Sustainable Silicon Valley Initiative because they contribute to global warming.

Green Building

The YSC represents a landmark for San Mateo County in many ways. It is the largest capital project in its 150-year history and includes innovative techniques to reduce energy consumptions, water use, and its impact on the environment.

A cogeneration plant allows YSC to generate its own power for lighting, heating, and hot water. Local building materials were used whenever possible. Landscaping features drought tolerant native plants. The play field is constructed of synthetic grass made from recycled tires, saving both water and maintenance costs and allowing for use during inclement weather. Computer systems monitor the entire facility constantly to operate at the most energy-efficient level 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Moreover, electric vehicles will be used for onsite transportation. An endangered flower found in the area, fritillary, was protected throughout construction. Once the old juvenile hall and courts are torn down the area will be turned into a community garden. The YSC is expected to receive national recognition for its design practices and earn a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating.

Housing Policies and Initiatives

As the price of housing continues to rise, the issue of affordable housing has become a top priority for the County, evidenced in recent years by the establishment of a County Department of Housing (formerly the Office of Housing within the Human Services Agency) and the Housing and Endowment Regional Trust (HEART).

To alleviate traffic congestion and minimize environmental impacts, the County is focusing on infill housing and transit-oriented development. In 2006, the County Department of Housing initiated the Countywide Housing Strategy Project. Over the course of the next two years, this project will focus on increasing collaboration among existing initiatives and efforts, developing housing related tools and resources, and offering best practices for increasing the supply of affordable housing.

An ongoing initiative is the HOPE Plan to End Homelessness, which has set specific production targets for supportive housing and permanent housing for very low-income families. A best practice that works well is inclusionary zoning, which requires a certain

percentage of new housing units (usually around 15 percent) be reserved for moderate- or lower-income residents. In 2006, 16 jurisdictions in San Mateo County (Belmont, Brisbane, Burlingame, Colma, Daly City, East Palo Alto, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, Menlo Park, Millbrae, Portola Valley, San Bruno, San Carlos, San Mateo, South San Francisco, and the County) had some type of inclusionary housing program, and several are currently considering strengthening their current policies or adopting new ones.

2006 marked the beginning of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation Process, which precedes the review of each jurisdiction's

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Housing Element. San Mateo County was the first in the state to form a subregion that would internally manage its housing need allocation by allowing jurisdictions to trade allocation numbers in exchange for equivalent resources, in hopes that the overall housing need within the County would have a greater chance of being met. This next round of Housing Element review, set to take place through June 2009, will be critical in supporting policies that encourage the development of more affordable housing.

While the need for affordable housing is clear, significant challenges remain. The high cost of land in the County and the continued rise of construction costs make financing affordable developments exceedingly difficult. With federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds on the decline, the Board of Supervisors is exploring a permanent source of funding for HEART, which would

increase its capacity to fund affordable housing development and assist first-time homebuyers.

Water

To reduce water use in all its facilities, the County is installing an online utility management program. In real time, this program will monitor utility usage in each County facility for water, electricity, and natural gas consumption. It will send an alarm when there is unexpected usage and track consumption data over time.

As an example of a specific program, the County has installed 40 water controllers in the Maguire Correctional Facility to limit length of showers and flushes, flow restrictors in all faucets, and 10 waterless urinals over the past two years.