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Local News

er's got Kyoto on his mind

Unveils long-awaited legislation

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The Doer government will crack down on old beaters, leaky attics and pig poop to meet its climate change targets and, if that fails, Premier Gary Doer says he expects his government will get punted from office.

Doer unveiled long-awaited legislation Friday that obliges the province to meet its Kyoto targets -- a reduction in greenhouse gases equivalent to taking every passenger car in the province and more off the road.

To get there, Doer is throwing open the doors to electric vehicles like the ZEN car -- the second province to do so. And he's closing the door to cars older than 1995. Importing used cars that old for the purpose of resale will be banned, and a batch of tailpipe standards for all new cars are in the works.

Doer is also rewriting the building code to make energy efficiency part of the playbook. And landfills, a significant but obscure source of greenhouse gases, will have to start capturing their fumes by 2011.

The omnibus bill came with few details -- a host of new regulations and funding announcements are still to come. There's also a pot of \$145 million over the next four years, but that mostly includes federal cash from an eco-trust fund or money that was already budgeted for Manitoba Hydro's PowerSmart conservation program.

Doer says Manitoba's plan will start to produce cleaner air in a couple of years with the big bang delivered by 2012, unlike many provinces that have climate-change plans that don't kick in for decades. That includes British Columbia, which proposed the country's first carbon tax but won't mandate reductions until 2020.

"This is not a situation where we sign on to Kyoto and don't have a plan to deliver," said Doer. "If we don't achieve it, the ultimate penalty in 2011 will be defeating the government."

Curt Hull, project manager of the Climate Change Connection, said Manitoba's plan to tackle global warming is welcome news.

"This is terrific," Hull said moments after Doer described his government's green vision. "This is really a big day. They're putting into legislation what they've been talking about for some time."

Hull said the targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are obtainable and make sense. Those targets will also be met by government leading by example rather than imposing their will.

Manitoba must reduce its emissions to six per cent below 1990 levels by 2012 to comply with Kyoto -- the global warming pact much of the world has all but abandoned. That means slashing emissions by three million megatonnes -- a fussy problem in a province with no one monster emitter like Ontario's Nanticoke coal-fired power plant.

Its plan contains no mention of a rapid transit system for Winnipeg. Nor was there a mention of wind or geothermal power -- two forms of clean energy that Manitoba Hydro has been slow to embrace.

Doer said he's focused first on ridding the province of coal power using a separate tax on coal that starts in 2011 and applied to only a handful of companies. But he hinted that down the road he might turn to tougher methods, perhaps

legislation, to boost the province's wind production.

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Everything from cars to cows in Manitoba's green plan

CARS

Manitobans drive some of the oldest vehicles in the country, and when we do trade in our clunker we tend to opt for big gas-guzzling pickup trucks or Land Yacht SUVs.

The province wants to change that by getting us to buy smaller, eco-friendly vehicles or cars that don't run on gas at all, like all-electric cars.

One proposal is to restrict dealers from importing cars older than 1995 for resale.

In the same breath, if someone were bringing in a car older than 1995 for personal use, that would be OK under the proposed bill. The new rules would not apply to antique or classic cars. Before any of these regulations come close to becoming law, government has to define what an antique or classic car is; one man's classic car is another man's choice for the shredder.

Nick Roberts, executive director of the Manitoba Used Car Dealers Association, said the province has to meet with the industry to hammer out the details of these new rules.

"You either ban them all or let them in and let emission testers do their thing," Roberts said, adding the rules would work against small auto dealers.

The province will also "modernize" its highway traffic laws to allow low-speed electric and other no-emission vehicles on the road.

Ian Clifford, chief executive officer of the ZENN Motor Company in Toronto, the nation's largest builder of zero-emission electric cars, said he was encouraged by the Doer government's plan.

"Manitobans will be among the first consumers in the country to have real access to socially responsible transportation alternatives," he said.

The other thing on the horizon are new vehicle emission standards starting in 2010. What those standards will be, no one is sure.

Doer said Manitoba supports California's tough "tailpipe" vehicle emissions standards. Cars sold or imported in California must meet that state's emissions standards or they aren't allowed on the road, and Doer wants to set the same standards here.

FARMS

There's no fine way of saying this, so here it goes: You can't put a cork in a cow's butt.

When it comes to greenhouse gases caused by agriculture, almost half is caused by the burping and farting of livestock.

The Doer government realizes it can't do much about digestion on the farm, so under the proposed bill it will instead focus on nitrogen oxide from the use of fertilizer and methane gas caused by manure spreading.

The plan calls for the province to encourage more conservative use of fertilizers like anhydrous ammonia and covering of manure lagoons to trap methane.

Better practices in crop rotation will also be encouraged, sometimes by inspectors who will visit farms.

Those in agriculture welcome the proposals, many which are also in practice.

"We can make it work," Keystone Agricultural Producers president Ian Wishart said. "We're already well ahead of what the requirements are."

Wishart added KAP will be meeting with the province next week to discuss these and other issues.

INDUSTRY

The province has already said it is phasing out Manitoba Hydro's coal-burning power plant in Brandon by 2010.

In this week's budget, it also said it was bringing in a coal tax in 2011 to get the handful of other industries still using coal to get them to switch to something else.

Besides Hydro's Brandon plant, there are a half-dozen other big greenhouse gas emitters in Manitoba, including Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting in Flin Flon, Koch Fertilizer in Brandon, Transcanada Pipelines in Rapid City, Graymont Western Canada's lime plant in Faulkner and two city landfill sites, Brady Road, which is still open, and the long-closed Summit Road landfill.

Dumps like Brady are some of the province's greenhouse gas pigs. They spew nearly one million tonnes of methane into the air as garbage rots. That gas can be captured and recycled into energy.

That gas could even be piped to the University of Manitoba to heat a few buildings. There are a bunch of ideas for Brady's stinky gases, but they're taking too long to get going, Premier Gary Doer said. The legislation changes that, mandating that methane gas has to be captured by landfills by 2010. "Deadlines are good," said Doer, who also promised some funding.

The other industries either fall under provincial or federal regulations and between the two governments will be encouraged to reduce greenhouse gas production over the next four years.

By definition, these companies produce the equivalent of 100,000 tonnes or more of carbon dioxide equivalents per year.

To compare, one big coal-burning hydro plant in Ontario produces almost as much greenhouse gases as the entire province of Manitoba in one year.

HOUSES

Get out your caulking gun and start stocking up on pink insulation. In the next couple of years, a batch of new rules will be added to the building code to make new projects more energy efficient.

The building code amendments aren't due for another couple of years, but it's likely going to mean new homes and commercial buildings will have to install high-quality windows, a certain amount of insulation and a certain level of leak protection. And there's a special shout-out in Friday's bill to mandate certain standards for heating systems, meaning most new homes will likely have to have medium or high-efficiency furnaces.

Ron Hambley of the Winnipeg Construction Association said energy efficiency is already top-of-mind and most builders would rather see the government use incentives rather than a crackdown in the building code. "I don't think we need to mandate this stuff in the building code in order to get it done," Hambley said. "We'd like to keep the code as clean as possible."

TRANSIT

There's only an oblique mention of rapid transit in the plan -- the big-ticket project many say is critical to greening Manitoba. The province enshrined in legislation its deal with the city to cover half the operating cost of transit -- not just Winnipeg's current bus system but any rapid transit or LRT projects in the future.

CARBON TRADING

That's still a mystery. There's movement to create a continent-wide emissions trading scheme but it's been slow going. The Doer government is keen on such a scheme because Manitoba's clean hydro power and emissions reductions means the province can cash in on a cap-and-trade system. But no one has quite agreed on how a system will work. One might not be set up for another three or four years.

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