

The Republican, Springfield, MA
Greenhouse Gas Reduction Lags
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BOSTON – Midway through a decade-long effort to dramatically reduce greenhouse gases, Massachusetts is nowhere near meeting a series of key goals, according to a report released yesterday by environmental groups.

In 2001, the state signed a regional climate pact with other New England states and eastern Canadian provinces to cut the heat-trapping gases in an effort to ease global warming with the long-term goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by up to 85 percent. Massachusetts deserves a failing grade for its efforts to stay on track to meet that goal, a coalition of environmental groups said yesterday, although it gave the state a “C” for its overall greenhouse gas reduction initiatives.

“It’s a question of political will. It’s a question of leadership,” said Brian Thurber, of Clean Water Action. “There’s still time to make the 2010 goal. The question is whether the next governor is going to take this seriously.”

The group puts much of the blame on Gov. Mitt Romney. They point to his opposition to a proposed Nantucket sound wind farm and his decision to pull the state out of negotiations for a separate agreement known as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative to reduce global warming pollution from power plants in the Northeast. One of the goals of the 2001 agreement was to steadily roll back the state’s greenhouse gas emissions.

To measure the success or failure of that effort, the agreement set a series of deadlines. The first is 2010. By then, under the agreement, the state is supposed to have reduced its emission back to 1990 levels.

Environmentalists said the state will have to make some immediate changes if it wants to meet that goal. They conceded much of that work will be left to the next governor. Romney, who is weighing a run for president in 2008, is not seeking a second term.

The new governor should not only join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative but also reverse changes to the state’s clean air regulations proposed by Romney last year, activities said. Those changes would let owners of the filthiest power plants buy their way out of cleaning up their smokestacks by paying into a greenhouse gas trust fund instead. Eric Fehrstrom, Romney’s communications director, defended the governor’s environmental record.

He said Romney opted not to participate in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative because it could have driven up energy costs for consumers.

“Massachusetts has among the highest energy costs in the nation,” Fehrstrom said. “We have designed our greenhouse gas limits in such a way so that we can achieve lower emissions without burdening consumers and our economy.”

He also said Romney supports the idea of wind power, has backed some land-based wind projects and would consider a proposal to build a wind farm in Buzzards Bay.

Activists credit Romney for taking some environmentally friendly steps. He pushed initiative designed to curb urban sprawl and has encouraged the developing of housing near public transportation and town centers.