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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Contact: Tom Chapple, Director of Air Quality, (907) 269-7686

DEC Seeks Comments on its Estimates of Alaska Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has updated the initial February 2007 estimates of greenhouse gas emissions in Alaska. DEC conducted this work to support the efforts of the Governor's Sub-Cabinet on Climate Change. Among the tasks of the Sub-cabinet is to make recommendations to Governor Palin regarding opportunities for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases in the state.

"Regardless where one stands in the public debate over the causes of climate change, it is important to understand the sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the state in order to be able to evaluate how any proposed legislation restricting carbon emissions might affect Alaska communities and businesses," DEC Commissioner Larry Hartig stated. "Also, we might well find 'win-win' situations where energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions can both be lowered through a single action, such as through energy conservation or replacing a high-carbon source of energy with a less expensive low-carbon or renewable source of energy. The emissions report helps focus our attention," he said.

The original report contained the state's first comprehensive inventory and forecast for the years from 1990 to 2020. The updated report is based on a closer review of the February report's assumption and calculations coupled with a more detailed examination of the report's two largest emitting categories: industrial operations and transportation sources.

According to DEC's Air Quality Director Tom Chapple, the significant results of the update are:

- Calculated human-caused emissions of greenhouse gas pollutants in Alaska during 2005 are nearly identical to those reported in February 2007: updated from 52.1 to 52.8 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.
- Emissions in Alaska are comparable to those in Connecticut and Nevada and approximately 50% those emitted in Washington state.
- Industries in Alaska account for approximately 41.5 percent of total emissions, while transportation – mostly aviation – accounts for approximately 36.5 percent of the total.
- While cars and trucks are major sources of total emissions in other states, such as California, they account for around 7% in Alaska.
- Not only do Alaskans fly often, but Anchorage and Fairbanks airports are international air cargo centers where sales of jet fuel are big business. When Alaska-sold jet fuel is burned it accounts for 12 million metric tons of greenhouse gases a year – or 23% of total Alaska emissions. (It should be noted that most of these emissions are not released above Alaska skies.)
- Producing energy takes energy. Consequently, it is not surprising that Alaska's oil and gas business accounts for the largest industry source of these emissions, roughly 15 million metric tons of greenhouse gases per year.
- Alaska's electricity production – typically a state's major source of greenhouse gas emissions - accounts for just 6% of its total emissions for three major reasons. Alaska has a relatively small population; our use of renewable energy sources, mostly hydropower, is higher than most states at about 20%; and, in the populous Southcentral area, our natural gas energy base is a low carbon fuel. Changing energy sources in the future would change the level of emissions. Expanded use of hydro, wind, and geothermal electricity sources would lower greenhouse gas emissions in the state.

The emissions report only quantifies human-caused sources, not naturally occurring emissions and sinks (processes which absorb, trap or destroy greenhouse gases). For example, a growing forest is a carbon sink as it captures carbon dioxide, but wildfires release that same carbon.

“The report provides a better understanding of the sources and magnitude of Alaska's human-caused greenhouse gas emissions,” Chapple said. “We invite comments from the public on the data and assumptions in the inventory. Specifically, we invite comments on whether we might have missed relevant data, inadvertently missed any significant sources or activities or made any wrong assumptions.”

Anyone who is interested in learning more about the inventory can contact Clint Farr of the Air Quality Division at clint.farr@alaska.gov or 465-5127.

Notices of future meetings of the Governor's Climate Change Sub-Cabinet and its work groups, including agendas for those meetings, are available on its website at www.climatechange.alaska.gov

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For a direct link to the Draft Alaska Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, go to: http://www.climatechange.alaska.gov/docs/ghg_ei_rpt.pdf

Public comments are due February 1, 2008, and should be sent to Clint Farr at DEC via mail to 410 Willoughby Avenue, Juneau AK 99811-1800 or via email to clint.farr@alaska.gov