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As Climate Impacts Threaten Cities, Mayors Take Action.

Cities Step in to Lead and Aggressively Fill Void Left by Federal Government

Survey: Mayors Leading the Way on Climate – 2018

SAN FRANCISCO—A survey released today by the United States Conference of Mayors and the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) in San Francisco points to mayors as a key force behind U.S. action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions responsible for the growing effects of climate change. The Alliance for a Sustainable Future—a joint effort of the two organizations—was joined today at City Hall by San Francisco Mayor London Breed, U.S. Conference of Mayors President Columbia (SC) Mayor Steve Benjamin, dozens of U.S. mayors from across the country, and business leaders. The survey was part of a forum sanctioned by the Global Climate Action Summit meeting in San Francisco this week.

In the absence of federal action and a comprehensive climate policy, mayors have stepped up to fill the vacuum of climate leadership and counter efforts by the administration to stymie climate protection programs.

The survey found that 57% of cities responding are planning for new climate actions in the coming year.The effects on their cities, public health concerns, and cost savings are making low-carbon transitions an increasingly attractive option for cities – a bright spot for climate leadership despite the U.S. announcement of its intended withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

The survey is a window into the actions cities are taking or considering to limit emissions as 95% report they have experienced climate impacts – from flooding, heavier snow and ice storms, and wildfires to heat waves and drought – in the last five years. The impacts are a stark reminder for why mayors are acting to improve energy efficiency, purchase renewable energy, and adopt low-emission vehicle fleets.

Cities are also reporting strong collaboration with other local governments and private sector partners to address climate change. Respondents expressed great interest in pursuing new opportunities with private sector partners to improve building efficiency and advance renewable energy usage and low-carbon transportation solutions.

Both large and small cities are tackling climate problems, with large cities leading the way to green vehicle fleets and cities under 250,000 residents increasingly switching to renewable energy for municipal purposes.

Key findings from 158 responding cities nationwide include:

• Cities are buying renewable energy: 65% of cities use renewable electricity for municipal operations. 27 cities now cover 30% or more of their operational needs with renewables – a 20% greater rate for that benchmark than a 2017 Alliance survey – and 8 cities cover 100% ofmunicipal electricity needs with renewable power.

• Green vehicle purchasing programs: Nearly 60% of cities have programs, and 80% of new municipal vehicle purchases are made by cities with green purchasing policies.
o Bike-share and scooter-share services are the most popular transportation options cities are considering, with 22% of responding cities exploring bike sharing and 21% considering scooter sharing.
• Improving building efficiency: More than 70% of cities have energy efficiency polices for new and existing buildings. And better than half have policies or incentives in place for new commercial and residential buildings.
• Seeking business partnerships: 83% of cities are looking to the business community for support in advancing transportation, renewable energy, and energy efficiency solutions.
• Growing use of climate policies & initiatives: Over the last 12 months, 60% of cities have launched or significantly expanded a climate initiative or policy.
The survey included the responses of 158 cities from 39 states, including large and small cities ranging in size from 3,906 (Lambertville, NJ) to 8.5 million (New York City). Collectively, the cities surveyed represent more than 50 million Americans. The survey, now in its second year, is aimed at assessing the actions of cities to identify opportunities and help set priorities in their climate solutions.

“Our survey shows that cities of all sizes know that climate change is real. And, therefore, we are taking action. The U.S. Conference of Mayors is committed to lead in the development of programs to reduce carbon and make our cities healthier. Would it be easier if the Federal government and Congress were our partner? Yes. But in their absence, we will not abandon our responsibility to lead and preserve this earth for future generations,” said USCM President and Columbia (SC) Mayor Steve Benjamin.

“We know the business community wants to work with us. In Salt Lake City we have partnered with Rocky Mountain Power on a comprehensive program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We believe there are many utilities nationally which are willing to step up and tackle this issue. We will be reaching out to them more aggressively in the future,” said Chair of the Alliance for a Sustainable Future and Salt Lake City (UT) Mayor Jackie Buskupski.

“It is an honor to host this important forum of mayors and businesses in City Hall as part of the U.S. Conference of Mayors commitment to fight global warming. With our national leaders failing to confront climate change, the nation’s mayors are stepping up to make our cities more sustainable and protect our environment for future generations,” said San Francisco (CA) Mayor London Breed.

“The actions of this Administration seek to roll back the progress we have made on climate action. But the American people know that the weather is changing and beginning to threaten both urban and rural America, and that a major effort is needed to respond. Mayors have their ear to the ground. The need for climate protection is not going away. And neither will America’s mayors,” said USCM CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran.

“What we’re learning is that partnerships with the business community and local utilities result in far greater returns in reducing greenhouse gas emissions than mayors can do alone,” said C2ES President Bob Perciasepe. “It speaks volumes that so many cities have a high level of interest in private sector partnerships. They want solutions for their residents, and partnerships help provide the needed expertise, funding, and services to achieve them.”

About the Alliance for a Sustainable Future: The Alliance for a Sustainable Future was formed by USCM and C2ES in 2016 with the shared goals of keeping city officials and business leaders informed and empowered to design and implement local plans for low-carbon, sustainable communities.

About The U.S. Conference of Mayors: The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are nearly 1,400 such cities in the country today, and each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. Learn more at www.usmayors.org.

About C2ES: The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to forge practical solutions to climate change. Our mission is to advance strong policy and action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote clean energy, and strengthen resilience to climate impacts. Learn more at www.c2es.org.

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