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## Group aims at curbing greenhouse gas emissions

ANCHORAGE - A new global warming "sub-cabinet" will help Gov. Sarah Palin explore ways Alaska can reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions and develop policies to help the state adapt to climate changes.

The group will include the heads of the Environmental Conservation, Fish and Game, Natural Resources and Commerce departments, along with the state's Washington, D.C., office chief John Katz and a representative of the University of Alaska.

The state is preparing to respond to a petition filed two weeks ago by an environmental coalition urging mandatory reporting by large Alaska industries of their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The state's interest in curbing emissions represents a new emphasis for Palin, who expressed skepticism about global warming science during her campaign for governor last year.

"From my first meeting with her on this topic, I could tell she was interested in it and in the new information that was coming out," said Larry Hartig, Palin's Environmental Conservation commissioner, who will be chairman of the new sub-cabinet.

An international report released in February by the United Nations' main scientific panel concluded there was no longer reasonable doubt that human

activities were the main cause behind the documented increase in global temperatures.

Alaska is seeing bigger effects of climate change than most of the world. Dealing with those changes will remain the state's first priority, Hartig said.

"That doesn't mean we shouldn't be doing our fair share on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions," he said.

To date, the official state position has opposed actions in response to global warming.

On Tuesday, the Palin administration released its official opposition to a federal proposal to declare polar bears a "threatened" species. The state asserted that Alaska populations of polar bears are healthy and said worries about the bear are based on questionable projections of a shrinking polar ice cap.

The state also sided with the auto industry before the U.S. Supreme Court in a case heard last year, opposing efforts to push the Bush administration to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act.

Last week, the Supreme Court ruled against the Alaska side in the case. That decision could lead someday to a stronger federal role in regulating carbon dioxide emissions.

The state can do something about the problem right away by requiring industry to report emissions, Trustees for Alaska said in a petition representing 13 Alaska organizations. The environmental groups said a similar reporting program for toxic emissions, instituted nationally in 1986, led to substantial voluntary reductions by industry.

"Alaska is ground zero for the impacts from global warming, and it should be leading the nation in seeking solutions to it," said Randy Virgin, executive director for the Alaska Center for the Environment.

Hartig said no decision has been made on the environmentalists' March 29 petition, which legally must be answered in 30 days. But he said their proposal is generally in line with steps already under way by the state to

figure out where greenhouse gas emissions in Alaska are being generated.

A preliminary consultant's report, done with eight other Western states, found that air transportation and oil and gas production were major sources in Alaska. The DEC is planning a more detailed follow-up report, Hartig said.

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