

San Mateo to launch new environmental campaign

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San Mateo is set to kick off a year-long campaign aimed at getting residents, schools and businesses to reduce the city's carbon footprint.

At Monday's city council meeting, staff will unveil the San Mateo Acting Responsibly Together, or SMART, plan, to officials and the public.

"You can't begin to get things changed until you start educating, and that's really what this is about," Mayor Carole Groom said Friday. "I certainly hope that the entire city will embrace this and take a good hard look at what they're doing and how they can do a little bit better."

Initially, the campaign will focus on encouraging residents to carpool, use mass transit or bike and save energy in their homes by unplugging devices and using energy-efficient bulbs. San Mateo employees will also visit farmers markets and other city events to educate the public about the program and hand out water bottles and SMART fact cards, which city officials hope will eventually be good for discounts at local businesses, said Benjamin Goldstein, of the city manager's office.

Rancho Cordova-based municipal consulting firm PMC designed the campaign, which includes an online carbon counter for the city. Residents can start using that tool Monday to calculate their yearly impact on the environment, and the city will use the data to chart its progress, said Mary E. Hewitt, the project's manager at PMC.

"It's just a great way to monitor and evaluate and benchmark if there's been a reduction in carbon emission," Hewitt said. "We like the idea of making it unique to San Mateo so they have a way of monitoring their progress."

Over the course of the year, the city plans to extend the program to schools.

PMC and city staff will meet with school administrators and teachers to educate them about the program and fill them in on SMART materials geared toward children, such as a page on the Web site and fact sheets.

They will then seek to bring businesses into the program, which is funded by a \$40,000 Bay Area Air Quality Management District grant.

Council Member John Lee said he supported the program and predicted it would make "a significant difference."

But given San Mateo's ongoing financial problems, the council and staff will need to keep a close eye on expenses associated with the campaign and other city programs, Lee said.

"Public safety is to me so much more important than anything in our budget," Lee said. "We have to be prudent about the financial costs of moving forward and doing these things."

The city may extend the program beyond a year depending on its success and popularity.

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On the Web

www.cityofsanmateo.org/smart