

Stated Meeting: Capping Carbon

by Courtney Gross

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Watch out exhaust-spilling sports utility vehicles. Move over inefficient light bulbs. The New York City Council wants to replace you with more energy efficient technology.

At its Stated Meeting Wednesday, the council approved legislation that would reduce New York City's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030. The measure echoes a call by Mayor Michael Bloomberg earlier this year in his [PlaNYC 2030](#).

The council also passed a bill to make block-by-block parking regulations available online as well as a measure creating "greener" design standards for the city's parking lots. **Clogging Smokestacks**

New York City produces approximately 1 percent of greenhouse gas emissions - the pollutants that cause global warming - in the United States and about as much as Ireland or Switzerland, according to [PlaNYC](#). Nearly 80 percent of the emissions in New York City are attributed to [pollution from buildings](#), while about 20 percent come from transportation.

The bill, titled the Climate Protection Act ([Intro 20](#)), would first take aim at emissions spilling from government buildings, cutting that by 30 percent by 2017. It then mandates citywide emissions be slashed by 30 percent by 2030, including toxic fumes from private institutions and corporations. The bill was approved by a vote of 48 to 0.

James Gennaro, chairman of the council's Environmental Protection Committee, initially introduced the bill in early 2006 calling for a 30 percent reduction of emissions from government buildings by 2020. He said the council worked with the administration to include non-governmental organizations and businesses in the emission reduction plan. A private business or organization will not be fined if they do not comply with the new regulations. It will be up to the city to reduce emissions, said Gennaro.

Corporations, businesses and residents, though, will have a financial benefit from using green technology and reducing their carbon footprint, said Gennaro. By using green technology, they will be less reliant on fossil fuels, and their energy cost will decrease.

"If you don't get on board, you'll be paying higher fuel costs and left outside the mainstream," said Gennaro.

The 30 percent reduction will be based on 2005 figures. To comply with the legislation, businesses and residents could consider using energy efficient light bulbs, furnaces and boilers, city officials said. Council Speaker Christine Quinn could not estimate the cost to an individual business, but other officials said a initial investment in green technology can pay off

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far more in the long term.

When asked what incentive businesses would have to reduce emissions and whether the city could meet its goal without penalties for noncompliance, Quinn said, "We believe the track record of business today as it relates to environmental issues will get us to that goal."

To ensure the city is meeting its goal, annual reports will be submitted to the administration, other agencies and posted on the web that measure emissions from both public and private entities. **Green Parking Standards**

The council also unanimously approved new design standards (Res 1179) for parking lots, which include the addition of trees and vegetation for lots with more than 18 spaces.

If a lot has more than 18 spaces a tree will be required every 25 feet. According to Land Use Committee Chairwoman Melinda Katz, parking lots with more than 36 spaces would also need to include interior landscaping.

The vegetation will not only improve the aesthetics of the lots, but also will prevent storm water runoff, officials said.

The regulation will apply only to new lots and those that have expanded by more than 20 percent. **Parking Regulations**

For New Yorkers who are perplexed by the contradictory street signs strewn throughout their block, a so-called solution is here. The council approved a bill ([Intro 537-A](#)) requiring the Department of Transportation to create a searchable Web site that details parking regulations for every block in the city.

Transportation Committee Chairman John Liu said the regulation would not burden the city with an additional cost. The Department of Transportation already collects the information, and the bill merely requires that that information be accessible and readily available to the public.

"Almost every single block in the city of New York has some sort of parking restriction," said Liu. "There are not only confusing parking signs on these blocks, but in fact contradictory signs."

The bill takes effect in September 2009. Â