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Biane posts 'green' plan

County to vote on strategy for energy efficiency today

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SAN BERNARDINO - Paul Biane, chairman of the county Board of Supervisors, announced his "Green County San Bernardino" campaign on Monday, a set of initiatives promoting energy efficient homes and upgrades to stave off greenhouse emissions.

The move came one week after the county announced a settlement with Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr., who filed a suit against the county in April alleging its general plan didn't address global warming issues or include ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The county agreed to add a policy to the general plan addressing the greenhouse emissions within 30 months. The board also promised to identify sources of such emissions countywide and to adopt measures to address these problems.

If approved by the Board of Supervisors at its meeting today, Green County San Bernardino would:

- Require new county buildings and major renovations of existing county facilities to comply with the U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.
- Establish a voluntary green building incentive program for residential construction.
- Waive county building permit fees to anyone who wants to install solar panels, wind turbines, tankless water heaters and energy efficient heating/air conditioning systems in existing buildings.
- Establish a Web site, www.greencountysb.gov, to serve as a resource for the public to obtain information on creating and maintaining environmentally friendly buildings, landscapes and lifestyles. The public would also have access to various "green programs" the county offers.

Under the plan, builders who agree to the program's requirements would receive priority when their plan is reviewed by the county's Land Use Services Department.

"It's everybody doing a little bit that can make a big difference," Biane said during a news conference at the county government center, flanked by Supervisor Gary Ovitt and other county officials, developers and members of the Building Industry Association.

Though the announcement of Green County San Bernardino comes on the heels of the historic lawsuit settlement with the Attorney General, it was not a reaction to it, officials said.

"This has been in the works since before the lawsuit was filed," county spokesman David Wert said. "This is just something chairman Biane wanted to accomplish while he was chairman of the board."

If approved today, the measures outlined in the plan become effective immediately, Wert said.

The program has already been endorsed by the Santa Monica-based Endangered Habitat League.

"It's the first step in a very important journey," said Jane Block, a member of the organization who attended Monday's news conference.

Representatives of Arcadia developer Victory Homes, which specializes in the building of green homes, also attended the news conference.

Victory Homes has built about 250 homes in Victorville in the past two years and has started building energy efficient

green homes in Hawaii, said Todd Leibl, chief executive officer for Victory Homes.

It costs between \$5,000 to \$10,000 extra to build a green home. But the cost, he said, hasn't deterred buyers. He said there are only seven homes left in the Victorville development.

The price for the three to five-bedroom homes range from \$299,000 to \$349,000. One sold on Friday, Leibl said.

"I think they sell better because they're 15 percent more energy efficient than a regular home," Leibl said.

And that, he said, equates to a substantial savings in dollars and cents.

One man who didn't attend Monday's news conference was Lake Arrowhead resident Wayne Bowser, president of WJRB Consulting & Design, Inc. He too, specializes in building green homes and is currently building a certified green home in Skyforest.

Bowser was pleased to hear about Biane's plan.

"The only way things will move is if codes change that force builders to do more in energy conservation methods and provide more incentives by electrical companies and water companies," Bowser said.