

Schwarzenegger orders faster push for renewable energy

jsanders@sacbee.com

Published Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2008

California utilities, already struggling to meet a law requiring more renewable energy, saw the bar raised even higher Monday.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed an executive order calling on utilities to provide one-third of their power from renewable resources by 2020.

"This will be the most aggressive target in the nation," he said.

Increased reliance on renewable energy conceivably could hike future rates, however, because of higher production costs and the need to upgrade transmission facilities.

Schwarzenegger's order came on the eve of today's international summit on global climate change in Los Angeles.

California law currently requires utilities to produce 20 percent of their power from renewable resources by 2010.

It hasn't been easy.

Only about 12 percent of all California's electricity last year came from wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, small hydroelectric and other renewable resources.

Schwarzenegger's new order raises the target to 33 percent by 2020 and orders state agencies to lay the groundwork through planning and permitting.

Legislation is being drafted to put the tougher standard into state law, consider penalties for noncompliance and bolster the cost competitiveness of renewable energy, gubernatorial aides said.

Incoming Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, predicted that the incoming Legislature will pass such legislation within 90 days after returning in January.

"When we meet these standards, we will not only be creating our own energy independence, we will also be providing the pathway to high-wage jobs and economic growth for California," Steinberg said.

The push toward renewable energy is part of a much larger strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to lessen the state's dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Schwarzenegger also signed a separate agreement Monday in which the California Energy Commission and the Department of Fish and Game will work jointly to cut in half the time spent processing applications for renewable energy projects.

Schwarzenegger said his goal is to expedite the permitting process while maintaining key environmental protections.

Call Jim Sanders, Bee Capitol Bureau, (916) 326-5538