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Latest figures show B.C.'s carbon emissions continue to increase



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The B.C. government has quietly released the latest figures on B.C.'s carbon emissions that show the province continues to have an uphill fight to make significant targeted reductions.

The latest figures, for the year 2015, estimate B.C.'s carbon emissions at 63.3 million tonnes of carbon equivalent, an increase of 1.6 per cent over the previous year.

More critically, the emission level is only two per cent less than in 2007, putting the province a long way from its original legislated target of reducing emissions 33 per cent by 2020 over 2007.

Mining and upstream oil and gas production are the biggest single contributor, at 7.2 million tonnes, according to the province's categories. Next are emissions from heavy-duty diesel vehicles at 6.92 million tonnes.

The previous B.C. Liberal government admitted the 2020 target would not be met and only renewed a target of reducing emissions 80 per cent by 2050. They did not adopt a new target of 40 per cent by 2030, recommended by a climate panel it had commissioned.

The new NDP B.C. government, which ousted the Liberals in last year's spring election, said the 2015 emissions were offset by 1.7 million tonnes of forestry offsets, reducing the emissions to 61.7 million tonnes.

The Sierra Club of B.C., an environmental group which monitors climate data, said it is alarmed by the latest figures and is calling for more immediate and significant action to reduce carbon emissions. Those include more quickly increasing the carbon tax, putting a climate test on all major industrial projects, increasing protection for old growth forests that store carbon and holding a public inquiry into fracking, a method used to extract natural gas in northeast B.C.

"B.C.'s latest emissions data marks years of failure to reduce emissions by more than a token amount," said Sierra Club B.C.'s forest and climate campaigner Jens Wieting.

"B.C. has just two years to make up for this lack of progress towards meeting its 2020 target, and to prepare steps to achieve much more dramatic emissions reductions needed to contribute to the goal agreed to at the Paris climate summit to keep global warming below two degrees."

The NDP government, led by Premier John Horgan, had promised during the election to implement a comprehensive climate action plan to reduce emissions and help the province prosper economically.

The NDP also said they would phase in the federally mandated \$50 per tonne of carbon price by 2022 over three years, starting in 2020.

The government has created a new climate advisory council to provide advice, but has set no dates for a new climate action plan.

The B.C. Ministry of Environment did not respond to a question on when it expects to introduce a new plan.

In a written statement, ministry spokesman David Karn said: "We know serious work is needed to accomplish these emissions reductions which is why we are already taking real leadership on the climate file."

The statement pointed to the new government's plan to introduce a legislated 40 per cent reduction target by 2030.

Wieting also noted that while forestry carbon credits can be a way to reduce carbon emissions, they must meet legitimate standards and must be combined with meaningful progress in reducing actual emissions.

As well, they must take into consideration what is happening on the entire forest land-base, he said.

The province does not include emissions from forest growth, wildfires and slash burning in its emissions.

In 2015, a bad wildfire year, emissions from burned forests were estimated at 48.7 million tonnes, greater than from forest growth (minus decay) of 28.4 million. There was no figure for slash burning.

Emissions from wildfires in 2017 would likely be much greater, as more than 1.2 million hectares of forest burned, more than four times the 300,000 hectares that burned in 2015.