

Mayors huddle over warming strategies

Robert Redford hosts conference on local changes in carbon use

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SALT LAKE CITY - Nearly 30 mayors from around the country are meeting at a nearby ski resort owned by actor and environmentalist Robert Redford to discuss ways to combat greenhouse gas emissions.

Redford is co-hosting the second annual Sundance Summit on climate protection with Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives.

Organizers expected a tough audience.

"It's probably 60 percent (of the mayors attending who) are skeptics," says organizer Michelle Wyman, executive director of the council.

Wyman, Redford and Anderson hope to engage the mayors, who represent cities ranging from San Francisco to Warwick, R.I., in discussions on ways to cut the amount of fossil fuels consumed, both by city governments and by the residents they serve.

"We've seen those at the national and international level have policy dialogues that take a very long time to actually translate into action," Wyman says. "Mayors have direct and immediate access to design and implement actions that begin to quantifiably reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Salt Lake City is one of more than 300 cities nationally that have committed to meet greenhouse gas reduction goals set by the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement the U.S. government has not signed.

Salt Lake City met its goal in 2005, cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 21 percent from 2001 levels.

The city made changes such as eliminating sport-utility vehicles from the city's fleet, buying natural gas vehicles and capturing methane gas released at the city's wastewater treatment plant and landfill for electricity generation.

The city also purchases wind power.

"We're headed for worldwide disaster if we don't all do our share," Anderson says. "It's not just an economic and environmental imperative, it's the greatest moral imperative that applies to leaders everywhere — whether in religion, education, (science) or government. We're already seeing drastic consequences from global warming."

Mayor Kevin Burns of North Miami, Fla., worries his city could experience disaster as a result of climate change, including more frequent and more powerful hurricanes.

His city is considering establishing adding fuel-efficient vehicles to its fleet and rewriting city codes to include incentives for green buildings.

"There's a lot of things we can do locally," Burns says, adding that he hopes to glean new ideas from other mayors at the summit. "We all don't need to reinvent the wheel. If something is working in another community, maybe it can work in mine."

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