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Marylanders Support State Climate and Energy Policies including Renewal of the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act

Poll shows two-thirds of Marylanders say their health – and that of their communities – is vulnerable and harmed by climate change

BALTIMORE, Md. (October 29, 2015) – For the third year in a row, a majority of Marylanders say they support most state climate and energy policies, including expanding government-backed incentives for energy-efficiency programs and mandating energy suppliers to meet the current target for renewable energy, according to a new survey.

About two-thirds of Marylanders also say the state should renew the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act, the state's framework for addressing the impacts of climate change. This law to renew Maryland guides a broad array of state climate, energy and health policies that will result in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (the pollution that causes climate change) by 25 percent by 2020 and is up for review by the General Assembly in 2016.

The survey by George Mason University and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health was mailed to more than 6,400 households in Maryland. Its release coincides with an upcoming progress report by the Maryland Department of the Environment expected to show that the state is on track to meet its 2020 pollution-reduction goal.

The survey results are detailed in three reports, available at www.climatemaryland.org:

- Public Perceptions of Climate Change
- Public Knowledge, Behaviors, & Preferences about Energy
- Public Health, Energy & Climate Change

Marylanders say harm to the Chesapeake Bay and its aquatic life are among the most likely effects from climate change. At the top of the list of community resources that Marylanders expect to suffer from climate change in the next several years are aspects of the state's coastal heritage: aquatic life, such as crabs and fish (62 percent); the Chesapeake Bay (58 percent); coastlines (54 percent) and the fishing/seafood industry (53 percent).

More than two-thirds of residents say state and local governments should take action to protect communities from climate change (71 percent). In addition, roughly 7 in 10 Marylanders say they (72 percent), people in their households (68 percent) and those in their communities (69

percent) are vulnerable to the potential health impacts of climate change.

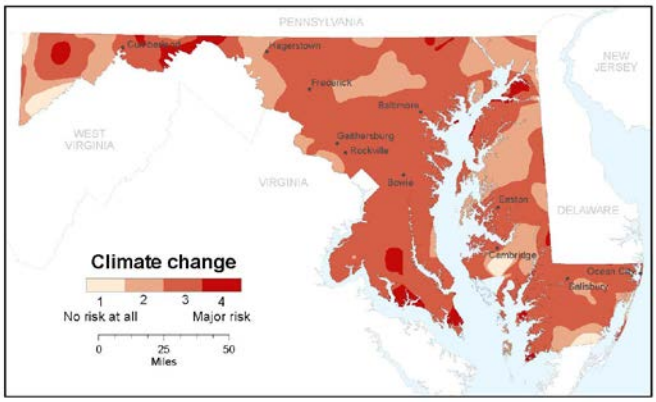
"The survey results provide ample evidence that there is considerable public appreciation of the environmental challenges we face in Maryland," said Peter Winch, MD, MPH, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The survey also found that more than two-thirds of Marylanders say that climate change is affecting people's health, already harming them (67 percent), their community (67 percent) and people in Maryland (68 percent). Many respondents identified direct and indirect effects of climate change as personal health threats as well, such as heat waves (53 percent), polluted water (71 percent), infectious diseases (74 percent) and air pollution (82 percent).

"Marylanders understand that fossil fuel energy use, air pollution and climate change are harming their health and are willing to do something about it," said Cindy Parker, MD, MPH, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "This is an important message for our policymakers to hear."

"People are also supportive of an alternate energy future, and are willing to pay more for solar- and wind-generated electricity," added Winch. "A majority of Marylanders want to see the state renew its mandate to reduce the pollution that causes climate change, if not strengthen it."

The researchers found that a majority of the state does not want to pay more each month on their electricity bill for coal, nuclear and natural gas-powered electricity, but they are willing to pay more for wind (67 percent) and solar (68 percent). Marylanders have become increasingly supportive of renewable energy. Between 2013 and 2015 there was an increase of 16 percentage points – from 47 percent to 63 percent – in the number of people who said there should be much more solar energy produced. There was also an increase of 19 percentage points of people who said that much more wind energy should be produced, a shift from 36 percent to 55 percent.



Climate change is recognized as a personal health threat by almost two-thirds (63%) of survey respondents. *(How much of a risk do you feel [climate change] poses to your health and well-being?)*

The support for renewables is consistent across all regions of the state with a majority willing to pay more for solar and wind from the four westernmost counties (wind -- 63 percent; solar -- 64 percent) to the Eastern Shore (wind – 65 percent; solar – 66 percent).

"There are regional differences in the way that Marylanders think about these issues; you can see that in the public opinion maps we developed this year," said George Mason University's Karen Akerlof, PhD. "But the consensus is stronger than most Marylanders realize, across all areas of the state."

This year's survey, as well as surveys from the previous two years, can be found on the Climate Communication Consortium of Maryland's website: www.climatemaryland.org, and the

conversation can be followed on Twitter at #CleanerMDnow. The surveys were fielded from April 11 to June 24, 2015. The unweighted sample margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval for the state and less than +/- 5.7 percentage points for each region.

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