



ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES OF NEW YORK

YOUR GOVERNMENT WATCHDOG

2017 Policy Agenda

New York State has led the way for its citizens to enjoy protections that have improved the quality of all of our lives. It was the first state to create an environmental protection agency, it created the first acid rain law in the country, and more than 100 years ago it established Forever Wild as a Constitutional right.

Despite this legacy, millions of New Yorkers grapple with dirty air, a changing climate, dangerous crude oil trains passing through our communities, perilous new gas and oil pipelines, tens of thousands of unregulated toxic chemicals, and a crumbling drinking and wastewater infrastructure. The impacts of these conditions, and others, damage our environment, make people sick, degrade our quality of life, and divert public dollars from more positive uses.

In 2017, there will be resistance to environmental protections, as well as attempts to roll them back, by our federal government. However, New York has a unique opportunity to show the nation – and indeed the world – how a healthy environment and growing economy work hand-in-hand. New York should continue to build on its proud environmental legacy by:

- Becoming a true climate, renewable energy, and environmental justice leader;
- Establishing a Constitutional right to healthy air, clean water, and a safe climate;
- Investing and building upon budgetary programs that protect our health and environment;
- Following through on Governor Cuomo’s promise to make New York a “refuge” by setting nation-leading clean air and water protections that New Yorkers can rely on; and
- Cleaning up our waste stream and reducing harmful pollutants which leach into our waters, foul our air, litter our streets, and compromise public health.

Making New York State A Global Climate Leader

New York’s public officials must find common ground to turn stated climate goals into enforceable law. Only then will New York lead in the development and deployment of clean energy technologies, energy efficiency for homes and businesses, and green jobs. Through such a partnership we will also create equity for communities on the front lines of climate change: low-income residents, seniors, communities of color, immigrants, and vulnerable people who are often the last to get relief when disaster strikes.

To win the climate protection and clean energy race, 2017 must be the year that we set in law Governor Cuomo’s goal of eliminating all fossil fuel usage by 2050. Getting there requires a comprehensive plan, backed by law, to shift New York’s economy to one entirely powered by clean, renewable energy. Our climate plan of action includes:

- Enacting the Climate and Community Protection Act to set legally binding clean energy and climate goals from the 2015 State Energy Plan, and require all state agencies and local governments to screen every decision against climate, social justice, and workforce development “tests;”
- Ensuring that New York leads in strengthening the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and expands the program to the entire economy, including transportation and buildings, etc.;

- Tightening the rules governing the use of RGGI auction revenues to prioritize frontline, environmental justice, and disadvantaged communities, with at least 40% of the operating budget dedicated to projects that directly benefit them; and
- Developing new – and expanding existing – policies to elevate energy efficiency, electric vehicles, energy storage, electric grid modernization, geothermal and offshore wind in order to protect public health, invest in local economies, and create jobs.

A Right to Healthy Water

It's easy to take clean water for granted until crises occur. From pollution caused by sewage overflows, to chemical contamination, healthy water must be better protected. Our clean water plan of action includes:

- Securing new and long-term clean water infrastructure grant funding for communities;
- Ensuring New York adopts a “precautionary approach” when it comes to oversight of the nearly 80,000 unregulated chemicals in use which can cause public health crises like those in Hoosick Falls, Petersburg, and Newburgh; and
- Building on New York's fracking ban by extending it to the disposal of oil and gas waste in New York landfills, and as dust and ice control on roads.

Investments to Protect Us

Governor Cuomo and legislators have few responsibilities that impact our lives more than the New York State Budget. The SFY 2017-18 Enacted Budget should:

- Fully fund and implement the life-saving Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (which legislators have delayed since 2010);
- Support green capital investments like Superfund and the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF);
- Reduce exposure to toxins such as lead in drinking water, and pesticides, with funding of the Children's Environmental Health Centers – a statewide network of pediatricians, nurses and health educators who work to improve the health of children through research, prevention and treatment; and
- Invest in more “environmental cops on the beat.” Due to years of flat budgets, which translates into cuts, short-staffed agencies (e.g. the Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of Parks, and Health Department) struggle to meet growing demands as public health is compromised and polluters propose new and dangerous projects.

Additionally, New York should once and for all make it legal for citizens to seek judicial relief from environmental threats and health hazards.

Stopping Rollbacks

Special interests and their allies in the Legislature work each year to weaken, block, or delay environmental protections. Environmental Advocates will continue to act as a “watchdog” and identify these assaults, sound the alarm with the media, public, and decision-makers, and work overtime to ensure bad proposals are dead on arrival. This may include attempts to rollback environmental regulations or block local governments from acting to reduce the use of disposable bags and other waste, a reprise of last year's attempt to thwart Governor Cuomo's clean energy agenda, and raids on off-budget climate and clean energy funds (e.g., RGGI auction proceeds). We will work vigilantly in 2017 to ensure these and other existing environmental protections and resources are not weakened or diminished.