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Report: Global warming will cost Florida

BY MARY ELLEN KLAS

Stopping global warming. The melting of the Greenland ice cap. The slide of coastal property into the sea.

It's all going to cost Floridians a lot of money, but doing nothing will only cost more.

That is the conclusion of a report released Wednesday by Environmental Defense, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group. The report was compiled by Tufts University researchers.

If Florida and the globe continue business as usual, the report predicts, by 2050 tourism will decline, sea levels will rise 23 inches, insurance and electricity prices will soar and the economic cost to the state will be \$92 billion.

"We're on an escalator that's headed down," said Frank Ackerman, an author of the report. "The status quo is not an option that is going to continue."

Another report, released two weeks ago by the Florida Chamber of Commerce and paid for by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, sends out a different warning. If Florida adopts policies pushed by Gov. Charlie Crist to meet his climate change projections -- such as lowering greenhouse gas emissions to 2000 levels by 2017 and 1990 levels by 2025 -- every Florida household could see costs increase 82 percent by 2020.

What's worse, says the report written by economists at CRA International, "a massive change in Florida emissions only leads to a small global change," the report said. "No matter how well policies are designed, there will be a significant overall cost to Florida of meeting the caps."

The dueling reports are the first salvos in an emerging war over the cost of slowing global warming. House Speaker Marco Rubio raised the specter of the legislative fight to come when the House sponsored a daylong climate change summit in October that focused on the science and cost of the issue.

It's a battle that's already brewing in other states and Washington, D.C., where the issues have been discussed longer.

"This is where we see the debate going in Tallahassee and it's our organization's way of saying we're not going to cede an inch of ground on this issue of cost," said Jerry Karnas, Florida

project director for Environmental Defense.

The report, *Florida: The Costs of Inaction*, was several months in the making, Ackerman said. It was launched before Crist issued his executive order in July directing the state to adopt tough new carbon dioxide emissions standards to reverse the impact of global warming by 2020. It is patterned after a similar report Ackerman and colleagues did for Britain last year.

By contrast, the chamber report, *Economic Analysis of Florida's Executive Order*, is in response to the governor's initiatives -- and the brewing concern among fiscal conservatives that if the governor's standards are enacted, the technology won't be available to make it economically feasible for industry to adapt.

The chamber report also notes that "unlike other pollutants, greenhouse gases have no local effect" and even though Florida produces 1 percent of the world's pollutants, "it is far too small for Florida acting alone to have a measurable impact on climate."

Ackerman disagrees. "There's a problem of collective action," he said. "We are all hostage to everyone else's good intentions. Florida is 1 percent of global emissions but, combine it with California and a number of other states and you could have a real momentum for seeing change spread more broadly. You can't conclude that it's not worth starting."

The report clearly attempts to send a message of dread if Florida chooses to sit it out. It is chock full of grim scenarios like these:

- If sea level rises 23 inches by 2050, all but six square miles of Monroe County will be swamp and 70 percent of Miami-Dade.
- That means residential real estate, now valued at over \$130 billion, will be affected, so will half of Florida's beaches, two nuclear reactors and 99 percent of all mangroves.
- Average annual temperatures will rise 2.5 degrees by 2025 and 5 degrees by 2050.
- The warmer climate will make Florida less attractive to tourists year-round, resulting in a \$9 billion decline in tourism by 2025 and \$40 billion by mid-century.
- Hurricanes will be more intense, resulting in more damage and higher costs -- estimated at \$25 billion by 2050 -- and the cause of 19 additional deaths.

If Florida "achieves its ambitious target of 80 percent reduction in emissions by 2050, and the rest of the world follows suit with significant and immediate action," the outcome will be less severe, the report claims. For example, temperature will increase only 1.1 degrees by 2050 and .6 degrees by 2025 and sea level will rise only 1.8 inches by 2025 and 3.5 inches by 2050.

Meanwhile, support is growing for Florida regulators to impose some kind of guidelines on the state to reverse the release of pollutants into the air. At its last meeting, the Florida Energy Commission adopted a recommendation to set greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets but

pushed them back three years later than Crist's, to provide more time to add nuclear generation to Florida's energy mix and to get the technology in place to make biomass and solar energy more affordable.

"Florida's current energy situation didn't materialize overnight," commission chairman Tommy Boroughs said last week. "It's not realistic to think we can change it overnight. But with a strategic approach, public participation and advances in energy technology, we can change it in ways that will benefit Florida's economy and environment."

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