

# Watt's Happening?

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## Ontario announces sweeping climate action plan



*Rooftop solar installations like this one, already the norm in Ontario, will become even more*

*popular with that province's new climate action plan. (photo by Roy Mumby)*

Ontario will slash its carbon footprint with a new \$7-billion action plan. After fine tuning at the cabinet level, complete details are expected to be released to the public in June.

“We are at the cusp of a once-in-a-lifetime transformation,” says the plan, signed by premier Kathleen Wynne. “It’s a transformation of how we look at our planet and the impact we have on it. It’s a transformation that will forever change how we live, work, play and move about.”

With this plan, Ontario will begin to phase out gas heating in homes, provide incentives to switch to electric and geothermal heat sources, encourage electric vehicles, and much more.

### BIG CHANGES

The plan includes changes that will affect the way Ontario residents and businesses do most everything, including:

- \$3.8 million for new grants, rebates and subsidies to help improve the energy efficiency of buildings, move them off of natural gas heat to geothermal and solar. A new Green Bank will administer these programs and provide financing options;
- \$285 million for electric vehicle incentives, including up to a \$14,000 rebate per electric vehicle purchased and up to \$1000 to help install a home EV charger, plus free electricity for overnight charging,

and lots of new charging stations. The plan sets targets that will expand EV sales to 5% of all vehicle sales by 2020 and up to 12% by 2025, a total of about 1.7 million cars. This is a major shift for the province's \$16-billion auto sector.

- New fuel standards that will require all liquid transportation fuels like gasoline and diesel to slash their life-cycle carbon content. \$176 million will provide incentives to fuel retailers to buy more biodiesel and ethanol blends. Natural gas will be required to contain more renewable content, like gas from agricultural waste products;
- \$280 million to help school boards and trucking companies to switch to lower carbon vehicles including electric busses;
- \$200 for new cycling infrastructure;
- \$375 million for research and development into new clean tech, plus \$140 million for a new Global Centre for Low-Carbon Mobility at an Ontario university or college for research into new EV technology;
- \$1.2 billion to help industry cut pollution and buy more energy-efficient machinery;
- \$174 million to make the Ontario government carbon neutral.

Wow. Controversial? Yep. Going to happen? Probably.

## **BIG SAVINGS**

It's interesting to note that the biggest carbon savings will be from upgrading the thermal efficiency of buildings and moving them off of natural gas heat, currently supplying 76% of all heating in the province.

Eligible for rebates will be geothermal heating systems, air heat pumps and rooftop solar heating, all of which once installed will provide heat at a much lower cost than gas heat and a near zero carbon footprint while operating.

The \$7-billion budget for the new plan is to be spent over 4 years, paid for with money raised with the province's new cap-and-trade carbon pricing system to come into effect next year. Between the new plan and cap-and-trade, Ontario plans to cut its carbon emissions to 15% below 1990 levels by 2020, 37% by 2030 and 80% by 2050.

These are the kinds of goals recently set at the global climate talks in Paris, and that much of the world has agreed to adopt. Ontario's plan is therefore a hint of what we can expect to see implemented around the world if we are to keep climate heating below 1.5 to 2 degrees, thus averting the very worst effects of human-caused climate disruption.

Of course, while we're at it, we'll improve our overall quality of life, reduce pollution in general, reduce our utility bills, create countless jobs and become more efficient and thus competitive. Disruptive? Sure, but loads of benefits too.

Which reminds me of the old global warming joke: A man stands up at a climate summit and asks, "What if it's all a big hoax and we end up creating a better world for nothing?"

The move to clean energy and a low-carbon economy just makes sense. At the moment, Ontario continues to lead the charge in Canada. Will other provinces soon follow?

Yep, because that's Watt's Happening.

## **Quick Fact: Alberta announces new carbon levy**

Alberta has announced a new province-wide carbon levy that will begin January 1, 2017. Starting at the equivalent of \$20 per tonne of carbon dioxide and rising to \$30 in 2018, the levy will protect price increases for low and middle-income households while raising funds for new public transit and renewable energy projects. Alberta is under both national and international pressure to reduce its very high carbon footprint.