

Charlottesville-area businesses plan to lead by example on greenhouse gas emissions  
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Like a gym buddy or academic advisor, local nonprofit Community Climate Collaborative (C3) is set to keep companies and organizations accountable for shared emission reduction goals and help them navigate the process.

On Wednesday, C3 formally announced the Green Business Alliance (GBA) — a consortium of Charlottesville-area businesses and nonprofits with goals of reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2025.

Gov. Ralph Northam also attended as a guest speaker to commend the groups and speak broadly about climate-related legislative action the state has recently achieved.

"This is a great example of the influence businesses can have on addressing climate change," Northam said.

The event was held outside Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital, one of the 16 businesses to form the alliance.

Northam pointed to Virginia's recent adoption of the Virginia Clean Economy Act, the Clean Cars Act and the state joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative — colloquially referred to as RGGI.

"It takes a village," the governor said. "It's going to take all of us working together to address climate change."

While some Fortune 500 companies have announced climate action goals in recent years, C3 Executive Director Susan Kruse said GBA is about how small or midsize companies can have an impact, as well.

Her team collected three years of emissions data from the 16 participating entities to analyze ways they can reduce carbon emissions. Kruse said participating companies will submit their data each year to keep track of annual targets.

“For Virginia to reach net zero by 2045, we need businesses to step forward and take a leadership role in reducing their emissions,” Kruse said to Charlottesville Tomorrow ahead of the event. “This is a group of business leaders that want to learn from each other and learn solutions from each other throughout the group.”

Participating businesses have in turn, have made changes like use of energy efficient appliances and fixtures, implementing use of solar or incorporating hybrid or electric vehicles into any vehicle fleets they may have.

Among the cohort — which includes renewable energy companies like SunTribe Solar, Sigora Solar and Apex Clean Energy — are a car dealership group and a fuel company.

Gordon Sutton, president of Tiger Fuel, stated that he may be considered an outsider within the group of more obviously eco-friendly organizations, but that his company has been committed to lessening its carbon footprint — previously installing solar panels to its facilities, using LED lighting and has goals of implementing EV charging stations at facilities in the future.

“While we are confident we will be operating in the spaces that we do for decades to come, there’s no question that the fossil fuel landscape is changing,” Sutton said.

Sutton also used his speech to announce the acquisition of Altenergy Inc., a solar company based in Charlottesville and Staunton that also has offices in a handful of states.

“I’m excited to embrace this opportunity for growth that I am confident will strengthen our company’s future,” he explained. “Small businesses like ours are the backbone of Virginia’s economy and we all have the unique opportunity today to do something good for the environment and do something good for our businesses.”

Meanwhile, Carter Myers Automotive — which owns a Nissan and Volvo dealership in Charlottesville — was also the first dealership in the state to operate on solar energy.

Liza Borches, its CEO was involved in legislative efforts to pass the Clean Cars Act — which will bolster hybrid and electric vehicles in the state. Her company has also previously collaborated with C3 on the promotion of the Nissan LEAF electric vehicle.

In noting how transportation is one of the largest contributions to greenhouse gas emissions, Borches said her industry has a choice to be complicit in not addressing the environment or be part of solutions.

“We can put our head down, keep pushing forward, selling a lot of cars and not be proud of what our industry is doing to contribute to our climate impact. Or we can pull up a chair to the table, be a part of the conversation and help find the strategic solutions that we all need for our future,” Borches said.

Kruse said that while it plans to collaborate with more businesses in the future to reduce emissions, the 16 inaugural members of GBA are organizations that have already demonstrated reduction efforts.

“When you look at corporate climate commitments on a global scale, you’ll find a lot of lofty goals but less action on the ground,” Kruse said. “These are business leaders that are already part of our community. They have already proven they can do the work and are willing to do more.”