

California approves new offset review guidelines

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California regulators voted 8-1 Thursday to adopt a new process for reviewing offset protocols.

In so doing, the California Air Resources Board (Carb) withdrew its previous adoption of four voluntary offset protocols, which were developed by the Climate Action Reserve.

Many in the market expected offsets from those projects to automatically be allowed in California's coming emissions trading scheme because they had been endorsed by Carb.

California expects its emissions trading programme to begin in 2012 in conjunction with other nearby states and provinces. Covered entities will be allowed to use offsets to meet some of their obligation under the law.

In testimony before the board on Thursday, Climate Action Reserve President Gary Gero said he supported Carb's new review process, but urged the board to move quickly.

"We believe it is important that the (Carb) compliance offset standards be completed as soon as possible so that offset projects have sufficient time to be developed and start generating emission reductions prior to the launch of the compliance market," he said.

Going forward Carb will perform an environmental analysis of protocols, which guide the design of the offset projects that can be used for compliance purposes.

Beginning in April, Carb will hold public workshops on evaluating protocols for compliance prior to board consideration.

Reserve officials say they are confident that its protocols will be adopted by the board for compliance usage when the time comes.

The four protocols whose adoption were pulled included a forest management protocol, which several environmental groups have said promotes the clear cutting of forests.

The Reserve has more than 200 voluntary projects in its registry in 41 states. It expects to certify and issue nearly 10 million tonnes of carbon credits by the end of this year, Gero said.

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