

Some bristle at green bills' cost

By: [Leah Fabel](#) 04/19/08 3:00 AM

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A package of global warming bills expected to pass the Montgomery County Council on Tuesday has critics alleging they offer false promises with a potentially crippling price tag, even as proponents cheer the county's green leadership.

The 25 initiatives put forth, including a switch to biodiesels for county vehicles and the first steps toward instating a carbon tax, were crafted by [Councilman Roger Berliner](#) with the aim of reducing the county's greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent in 2020, and by 80 percent in 2050. They would cost taxpayers about \$1.5 million, Berliner said, adding it was a "modest" cost to reap long-lasting benefits.

"No one has a clue how to reduce emissions by 80 percent," said [Patrick Michaels](#), a senior fellow in environmental studies at the D.C.-based [Cato Institute](#) and a professor at the [University of Virginia](#). "We're writing laws that are like legislative magic wands. ... The only way to get emissions down a lot is by making energy so expensive, no one can afford to use it."

Michaels explained an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions would bring the county to output levels last seen at the turn of the 20th century.

He also cited recent studies published in Science finding biodiesels actually produce more greenhouse gases than fossil fuels when production and land use are taken into account.

"And they also have the effect of raising food prices," Michaels said, "which is currently causing riots around the world."

Berliner's most controversial proposal requires all new homes in the county to be built to energy-efficient standards, a plan he said would cost more on the front end but would save homeowners money on their energy bills. On Friday, that initiative needed a fifth vote from the eight-person council to guarantee passage.

The group of bills up for a vote on Earth Day is "a serious package that sets in motion both the process and the substance of fulfilling the pledge we made as a county" to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Berliner said.

Michaels, an admitted cynic, said the bills represented throwing money after bogus results. "It's good to have enough money to afford holiness," he said.

Some of the 25 initiatives expected to be approved by the Montgomery County Council on Tuesday, Earth Day:

- » Reduction of SUVs in county fleet
- » Property tax credit for use of renewable energy and energy-efficiency improvements
- » Proposed membership in cap-and-trade program and a conversion of energy tax to a carbon tax
- » Energy cost savings plan for each county building
- » A program to grow more trees