

EDITORIAL - TORONTO STAR
Greening Ontario won't be this easy

May 12, 2007 04:30 AM

Premier Dalton McGuinty is right when he argues that there is no single "silver bullet" solution to curb greenhouse gases in this province. His ambitious plan to cut Ontario emissions, previewed in the *Star* this week, will take a concerted effort by government, business and consumers.

And while McGuinty plans to rely in part on modest consumer measures he calls "silver buckshot" to get us partway there – measures such as switching to energy-saving light bulbs and using fewer plastic bags – the premier should be careful not to suggest, as he did this week, that they will have a major impact on a huge problem.

Greening Ontario won't be that easy.

While McGuinty's approach will not be unveiled until June 11, the *Star* obtained an overview of its fairly ambitious targets.

Basically, McGuinty plans to set targets that will exceed both Prime Minister Stephen Harper's plans and those of Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory. While McGuinty has yet to provide a specific number, he aims to do better than Tory, who promises to cut emissions to a level 10 per cent below the province's 1990 emissions by 2020. In Ottawa, Harper is promising a feeble cut to a level 20 per cent below that of 2006 in the same time frame.

While McGuinty's tougher target is commendable, it is far from clear how he intends to get from here to there.

So far, the plan includes a provincial ban on incandescent light bulbs. A voluntary program to cut plastic bag use in half by 2012. And more incentives to encourage Ontarians to switch to fuel-efficient hybrid cars.

Queen's Park also intends to promote the construction of more energy-efficient buildings, and to find greater energy savings in its own offices.

Welcome as these measures are, their effect on overall emissions will not be large. What would?

- A serious push by Queen's Park, via carrots, sticks or regulation, to reinforce Ottawa's weak pledge to cut industrial emissions, which account for a big share of the total. There's no sign yet of such a push by Ontario.
- Getting more Ontarians, especially those living in cities and suburbs, to leave their cars at home more of the time, and using public transit. But that won't happen unless the McGuinty government makes major investments in public transit, something it has yet to do.
- Closing Ontario's dirty coal-fired plants by 2014. Queen's Park is committed to doing just that but when the plants are finally shut, cleaner replacement energy must be available to meet the demand for electricity. Projects like the proposed wind farm to power 250,000 homes may be a part of the future solution, but they cannot replace the coal plants. The same goes for replacing up to 25 per cent of the coal that is currently burned with wheat husks, wood chips and other cleaner burning sources of biomass. While better than coal, it is essentially a stopgap measure.
- Investing in nuclear power. McGuinty will have to look for other major sources of clean power, including new nuclear facilities. But the government has yet to unveil its nuclear plan. Until it does, McGuinty's green plan will be more hope, than strategy.

Silver buckshot is fine, as far as it goes. But if Queen's Park is truly committed to doing its part to fight global warming, it will need to haul out heavier artillery.