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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## Activists urging speedy cleanup

### Environmentalists seek support for legislative initiatives

By Justin Fenton  
sun reporter

January 16, 2007



Roasting in an [Annapolis](#) conference room on an unseasonably warm January day seemed appropriate to environmentalists yesterday as they appealed to lawmakers to support a variety of initiatives, some of which could address global warming.

With the Al Gore documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* being screened for lawmakers and General Assembly leadership pledging to enact tougher emissions standards for new cars, activists who attended yesterday's environmental summit said they sense a renewed chance to tackle environmental issues facing the state.

"There's a growing sense that environmental matters need to be addressed, and it seems like the blocks are falling into place," said Cindy Schwartz, executive director of the Maryland League of Conservation Voters.

At a rally, leaders of grass-roots organizations and environmental watchdog groups told a crowd of more than 400 people to be diligent in pressuring lawmakers to support progressive legislation. The issues should be "dinner talk, grocery store talk," said Del. Elizabeth Bobo, a Howard County Democrat.

Cleanup of the [Chesapeake Bay](#) was also at the top of yesterday's agenda. Some noted that officials sworn in this month will be in office in 2010, the deadline to remove the bay from the federal list of polluted waterways set in a multistate agreement.

"What an opportunity they have - what a responsibility they have. They can be heroes," said Will Baker, president of the [Chesapeake Bay](#) Foundation.

House Speaker Michael E. Busch advocated restoration of native oysters to improve the bay's ecology. Oysters filter pollution from water and build reefs, but they have all but disappeared because of disease and

overharvesting.

The outgoing Ehrlich administration has studied whether to introduce Asian oysters to the bay for years. The plan was delayed several times and criticized by some researchers, who worried that the foreign species might be susceptible to parasites.

Busch and Maryland Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller have endorsed a bill that would require California-style emissions standards, with Miller declaring the bill is "going to pass."

A similar proposal was defeated by a Senate committee two years ago and was not introduced last year. The state's auto-dealer lobby wants the legislature to take more time to study the issue.

Sen. Paul G. Pinsky, a Prince George's County Democrat and lead sponsor of last year's Healthy Air Act, plans to submit the Maryland Global Warming Act, which will seek to reduce Maryland emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, one of the largest mandatory reductions in the country.

Land-use advocates cheered yesterday Gov.-elect Martin O'Malley's promise to fund Program Open Space, a land-preservation program that uses real-estate transfer taxes for land purchases. The previous two administrations had shifted money from the program to help balance the budget.

O'Malley's choice to lead the state environmental agency, Shari T. Wilson, also reaffirmed that the administration would usher in a "BayStat" program to monitor water quality and instill accountability, patterned on a initiative called CitiStat used by O'Malley in Baltimore to track municipal problems.

"BayStat will really make a big difference and help set priorities," Wilson told the crowd.

But with O'Malley saying he likely will not seek to raise taxes or fees in the coming year, it is unclear whether the state has enough money to fund a long environmental wish list.

Del. Maggie L. McIntosh, a Baltimore Democrat who chairs the House Environmental Matters Committee, was one of the few speakers who warned that expectations should be tempered.

"These are all nice things, but we have to pay for it," she said.

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