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NEW EPA RULE ON COAL IS PLANNED

STATES ENFORCE THEIR OWN GUIDELINES ON POWER PLANT EMISSIONS

The Trump administration continued its battering of Obama-era environmental regulations by proposing a new rule that would replace the Clean Power Plan, which was designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants. The new plan would allow states to enforce their own guidelines.

Environmental groups, which noted that the EPA's own proposal shows the plan could cost more than 1,000 lives annually due to increased air pollutants, were already lining up to challenge the new Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) rule. The rule was proposed Monday under acting Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler, a former coal industry lobbyist. It would give states big leeway on how to restrict carbon dioxide gas and other greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say contribute to climate change.

The new proposal comes on the heels of an EPA proposal earlier this month to roll back fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks, also an Obama-era initiative. Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro has already said the state would join others, including California, to legally challenge that proposal.

The ACE rule would affect Pennsylvania, but it's not clear how much. Pennsylvania ranks third in coal production behind Wyoming and West Virginia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The state already sets its own limits on some emissions. About 20 coal-fired plants produced about 30 percent of the state's energy in 2017, according to the most recent data available.

The Clean Power Plan was designed to cut U.S. carbon dioxide emissions to 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. Republicans cited the plan as an example of federal "overreach." Though it was never enacted after Supreme Court legal challenges by the coal industry, coal-friendly states and labor unions, the Clean Power Plan was still a factor for companies weighing to close coal-fired plants. But an even bigger factor has been the switch to natural gas - another key industry for Pennsylvania, which is the second-largest producer in the nation.

The Trump administration says the new rule would set emission guidelines for states to use when developing their own greenhouse gas emission plans. The rule "empowers states, promotes energy independence, and facilitates economic growth and job creation," the EPA says.

A federal court has upheld that the EPA is legally obligated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 under the Clean Air Act.

The EPA says its new rule would not only save companies money by reducing regulation but also reduce carbon dioxide emissions from their current levels and meet its legal obligation - ultimately the equivalent of taking 5.3 million cars off the road. The EPA did not say how much time it would give

states to comply, but said the plan, when fully implemented, will actually reduce U.S. power sector carbon emissions more than the Clean Power Plan.

The public has 60 days to comment on the plan and the EPA will hold a public hearing.

(By Frank Kummer, Philadelphia Inquirer - 8-22-18)



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