



PRESS RELEASE

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Protect the Adirondacks Cheers EPA Actions for CO₂ Emission Reduction Regulations for Power Plants

Today's announcement marks the beginning of U.S. action on climate change

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Lake George, NY – Protect the Adirondacks cheers actions by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to release new draft greenhouse gas emission reduction regulations for over 1,000 existing power plants in the U.S. This action is a major landmark in environmental history. EPA estimates that 83% of greenhouse gas emissions are from carbon dioxide (CO₂) released into the atmosphere. As a group these coal-fired power plants are the single largest sources of CO₂ pollution in the U.S., producing nearly 25%. These new rules expect to produce a 20% reduction in CO₂ emissions from these power plants by 2020 and 30% by 2030 (based on 2005 levels).

“Today’s launch of a national CO₂ reduction program is a historic milestone. Today marks the beginning of U.S. action on climate change. This action is similar to the creation of the national Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Wilderness Act and Endangered Species Act. This is a major moment in U.S. environmental history,” said Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks.

The CO₂ rules announced today will be fully implemented before President Obama leaves office in January 2017. Regulations will be finalized by June 2015.

According to the EPA these are the basic facts. The making of electricity produces 32% of CO₂ emissions in the U.S. followed by the transportation sector at 28%, industry at 20%, commercial/residential at 10% and agriculture at 10%. The biggest fuel source used for the production of electricity is coal, which while it supplies 39% of electricity made, it produces 75% of CO₂ emissions from the electricity sector. About 29% of electricity in 2012 was generated using natural gas, which has grown by the hydro-fracking boom, followed by 20% from nuclear and 12% from renewables. Coal-fired power plants are the single biggest “stationary source” of CO₂ pollution emissions as they produce fully 25% of U.S. CO₂ pollution.

The new program is partly modeled after the success of the 1990 Clean Air Act (CAA) amendments, which inaugurated the cap-and-trade program. This is a system whereby a “cap” is set for the maximum allowable amount of pollution in tons for a polluter, based on science, and which can be modified over time if the environment is not adequately protected. The “trade” creates a framework whereby individual companies choose to either reduce emissions by making investments in pollution controls (or switching fuel sources) or to purchase “pollution credits” on the open market that allows them to pollute above their cap level. Companies that invest in deeper emissions controls can recoup their investments by selling credits each year for the amount they yield under their cap.

“Cap-and-trade has resulted in significant reductions in acid rain, lowering pollution levels to a point where once fishless lakes and ponds in the western Adirondacks can now support fish again. Cap-and-trade programs are currently in effect for sulfur dioxide or nitrogen oxide, the key pollutants in acid rain. Under the new C02 regulations, the EPA will set the caps for each facility,” said Peter Bauer.

The rules also require significant action by the states. Each state will be required to develop a state plan for the facilities within their borders. These plans are similar to other CAA plans that states have developed over the years. In one big difference with the recent Medicaid expansion under the federal Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), where some states have opted out of offering this program to state residents, the C02 regulations have no opt-out provision. If a state chooses not to develop a plan that meets EPA approval, then the EPA will develop and implement a plan for that state. An important factor in this program is that no state can opt out.

“It’s important to note that New York will need to develop a plan for how these rules will be implemented. This plan must be completed by June 2016. This means that New York will have to deal head on with climate change planning and focus on how the state plans to reduce C02 emissions,” said Peter Bauer.

Protect the Adirondacks

Protect the Adirondacks is a privately funded, IRS-approved not-for-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park in northern New York. PROTECT was formed through the merger of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and the Residents’ Committee to Protect the Adirondacks in 2009. PROTECT pursues its mission to protect the Adirondack Park and defend the public “forever wild” Forest Preserve through citizen advocacy, grassroots organizing, education, research, and legal action. PROTECT is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. PROTECT maintains an office in Lake George. For more information see www.protectadks.org.

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