

EPA finds greenhouse gases pose a danger to health

April 17 2009, By H. JOSEF HEBERT , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The Environmental Protection Agency concluded Friday that greenhouse gases linked to climate change "endanger public health and welfare," setting the stage for regulating them under federal clean air laws.

The EPA action marks the first step toward imposing limits on pollution linked to climate change, which would mean tighter rules for cars and power plants. Agency officials cautioned such regulations are expected to be part of a lengthy process and not issued anytime soon.

Limits on carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases would have widespread economic and social impact, from requiring better fuel efficiency for automobiles to limiting emissions from power plants and industrial sources, changing the way the nation produces energy.

In announcing the proposed finding, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said it "confirms that greenhouse gas pollution is a serious problem now and for future generations." She reiterated that the Obama administration prefers that climate change be address by Congress through broad, economy-wide limits on climate-changing pollution. But the EPA finding of endangerment prepares for possible regulatory action if Congress fails to act.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., whose Environment and Public Works Committee is considering climate legislation, said the EPA finding - stalled by the Bush administration - is long overdue but that "the best and

most flexible way" to deal with the problem is for Congress to take action on a broader approach.

Friday's action by the EPA triggered a 60-day comment period before the agency issues a final endangerment ruling.

The agency said in its finding that "in both magnitude and probability, climate change is an enormous problem" and that carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases "that are responsible for it endanger public health and welfare within the meaning of the Clean Air Act."

The EPA concluded that the science pointing to man-made pollution as a cause of global warming is "compelling and overwhelming." It also said tailpipe emissions from motor vehicles contribute to climate change.

The EPA action was prompted by a Supreme Court ruling two years ago that said greenhouse gases are pollutants under the Clean Air Act and must be regulated if found to be a danger to human health or public welfare.

The Bush administration strongly opposed using the Clean Air Act to address climate change and stalled on producing the so-called "endangerment finding" demanded by the high court in its April 2007 ruling.

The court case, brought by Massachusetts, focused only on emissions from automobiles. But it is widely assumed that if the EPA must regulate emissions from cars and trucks, it will have no choice but to control identical pollution from power plants and industrial sources.

Congress is considering imposing an economy-wide cap on greenhouse gas emissions along with giving industry the ability to trade emission allowances to mitigate costs. Legislation could be considered by the

House before the August congressional recess.

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