

Obama panel urges US backing for clean coal

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The smoke stacks of a coal power plant in New Haven, West Virginia are seen in 2009. A task force to President Barack Obama called Thursday for a strong government role to promote clean coal, potentially accepting liability over carbon storage sites for thousands of years to come.

A task force to President Barack Obama called Thursday for a strong government role to promote clean coal, potentially accepting liability over carbon storage sites for thousands of years to come.

Obama had asked the panel to recommend how to promote carbon capture and storage, or CCS, a largely undeveloped technology that aims to prevent carbon emissions blamed for global warming from entering the atmosphere.

While some environmentalists dismiss CCS as untested and costly, the United States along with several other nations such as China and Australia see it as crucial as it would allow continued use of [coal](#), which

is highly polluting.

The task force, which included 14 federal agencies and departments as well as stakeholders, called for government financial and technical support to meet Obama's goal of creating up to 10 CCS demonstration projects by 2016.

"A diversified energy portfolio, which includes coal, is important for a strong 21st century American economy," Nancy Sutley, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, said in a statement.

"These recommendations move us toward bringing safe and deployable CCS technologies to the marketplace to help us meet the goal of reducing harmful carbon emissions while continuing to use this energy source," she said.

Along with the high costs of CCS projects, the report said a potential hang-up was how to ensure liability for storage areas -- geological formations where carbon can be kept for hundreds or even thousands of years.

Private businesses, which must routinely reflect risks on balance sheets, "are uncomfortable undertaking these long-term risks," the report said.

It recommended work on a legal framework, including potentially "transfer of liability to the federal government after site closure," with some caveats.

The task force also called for a standing "federal agency roundtable" to push forward CCS.

The report comes even though the [US Congress](#) put on hold legislation to set up the first nationwide plan mandating cuts in carbon emissions.

In hopes of securing support of lawmakers from coal states, legislation -- including a bill approved last year in the House of Representatives -- has enthusiastically backed CCS.

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