

# EPA takes first step to cut industrial plant emissions

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The Environmental Protection Agency Wednesday unveiled what new large industrial plants will have to do to minimize their greenhouse gas emissions starting in January.

The guidelines will let industry choose the most cost-effective technology to reduce emissions on a case-by-case basis. The use of appropriate technology will make them eligible for new permits for greenhouse gas emissions that will be required for new and expanded industrial plants.

The EPA's steps are much more modest than the big stick of regulation that both opponents and supporters of climate legislation used to talk about. The agency said that much of the greenhouse gas reductions under the permit system would come through [energy efficiency](#).

The new guidelines are part of EPA's early efforts to start reducing the emissions of gases that build up in the atmosphere and trap heat. The Supreme Court ruled that the agency has the authority to regulate this form of pollution under the Clean Air Act.

The guidelines require that regulators make sure that new plants - or those that are upgraded so that they can expand production - use available technology to reduce [carbon pollution](#). Businesses can choose the most feasible and cost-effective approach.

The plan doesn't put a limit on emissions or require plants to reduce

them by a certain year. A bill to do just that passed the House of Representatives but failed to get support in the Senate. The EPA could require mandatory emissions reductions under other parts of the Clean Air Act, but hasn't announced plans to do so.

Gina McCarthy, the assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, said the technology requirements for new and expanded facilities are part of a "common-sense, step-by-step and transparent way" to reduce [greenhouse gas emissions](#).

She also said the agency has no estimate of how much of a reduction the emissions control technologies on new plants would achieve.

"This is not about capping or overall reductions across the country," she said.

Frank O'Donnell, the president of Clean Air Watch, a nonpartisan watchdog group, called the EPA announcement "a very modest first step."

"I hope this will quiet down the demagoguery," he said. "A lot of people are saying the EPA is going to ruin the economy and they're overreaching. There's nothing here that could hurt the economy in the slightest way."

Joe Mendelson, the director of global warming policy at the National Wildlife Federation, said the EPA's guidance on the best available technology to control emissions was a start toward using the Clean Air Act to address global warming.

"The EPA is saying, hey, there are a lot of inefficiencies out there that are contributing to our climate change problem, and you should start dealing with them," he said.

Even if the EPA eventually takes stronger action to curb climate change, it can't do enough on its own to get the amount of reductions that will be necessary by 2050, he said. "It really is looking at all our activities - in ways inside EPA's jurisdiction or outside it - that get us, frankly, to rebuilding our economy in a way that gets us the global warming reductions we need as a matter of survival between now and 2050."

Jeff Holmstead, an attorney who represents power companies and who was the EPA air administrator during the Bush administration, said the new guidelines would amount to a moratorium on plant construction.

"As a practical matter, no one is going to be able to get through EPA's new permitting process for a long time," he said in a statement through a spokesman.

EPA's McCarthy, however, said there won't be a moratorium. Regulators and industry had months to prepare, she said. The EPA held meetings with industry groups to hear their views about the permit requirements. Now regulators at the state and local level are ready to issue permits, and EPA expects the permitting will go smoothly, McCarthy said.

Scott Segal, Holmstead's colleague at the law firm Bracewell & Giuliani, said the uncertainties around the regulations would make electric power more expensive and less reliable.

The permit requirements apply to new and expanded large stationary sources of greenhouse gases, such as power plants, refineries and cement plants. Such large industrial facilities emit about 70 percent of the greenhouse gas pollution from stationary sources.

McCarthy said it's unlikely businesses will use carbon capture and storage, because the technology is still in the early demonstration stages and it's expensive. "Over time, we expect that situation to change," she

said.

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