

US to propose stricter smog standard

November 26 2014, by Dina Cappiello



in this July 8, 2014, file photo, Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., speaks to reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington. Inhofe, who will take over the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in January, said in a statement late Tuesday, Nov. 25, 2014, that a stricter standard to be announced Wednesday by the Obama administration on smog-forming pollution allowed in the air "will lower our nation's economic competitiveness and stifle job creation for decades." He vowed "vigorous oversight" of the proposal in his new position. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

Coming full circle on a campaign promise, the Obama administration

will propose Wednesday to reduce the amount of smog-forming pollution allowed in the air, which has been linked to asthma, lung damage and other health problems.

The stricter standard makes good on a pledge President Barack Obama made during his first campaign for the White House and one of his first environmental actions as president: reversing a decision by President George W. Bush to set a limit weaker than scientists advised. In 2011, amid pressure from Republicans and industries, and facing a battle for re-election, Obama reneged on a plan by then-Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa Jackson to lower the permissible level to be more protective of public health.

The initial range of 60 to 70 parts per billion proposed by the EPA in January 2010 would make it one of the most expensive regulations ever issued, with an estimated \$19 billion to \$90 billion price tag and would have doubled the number of counties in violation. People familiar with the proposal told The Associated Press that the agency would propose a preferred range of 65 to 70 parts per billion. The agency's scientific advisers had endorsed a standard of 60 parts per billion.

The agency will seek comment on 60 parts per billion as well as the current standard of 75 parts per billion put in place by Bush in 2008. Those familiar with the proposal were not authorized to discuss it by name ahead of the official announcement and spoke on condition of anonymity. The agency was under a court-ordered Dec. 1 deadline to issue a new proposal.

"Seldom do presidents get an opportunity to right a wrong," said Bill Becker of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, one of numerous advocacy groups that were enraged by the White House's decision to table the first proposal.

The new standard caps a string of historic moves by the Obama administration to improve air quality. The EPA has issued or proposed the first regulations ever to control heat-trapping carbon dioxide, mercury and air toxics from power plants. The administration also has doubled fuel-efficiency standards for car and trucks, and clamped down on industrial pollution that blows downwind and contaminates other states.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it would review the first-ever limits on mercury and air toxics, and whether EPA should have considered the cost of the regulation.

Other rules are likely to be targeted when Republicans take over Congress early next year.

Republican Sen. James Inhofe, who will take over the Environment and Public Works Committee in January, said in a statement Tuesday night that a stricter standard "will lower our nation's economic competitiveness and stifle job creation for decades" and vowed "vigorous oversight" of the proposal in his new position.

In a call with reporters Tuesday, the American Petroleum Institute said the EPA should retain the current standard.

Under the initial proposal, the number of counties in violation of the new standard nationwide would double. Smog cities such as Los Angeles and Houston would have been joined by California's Napa Valley and a county in Kansas with a population of 3,000. A higher range will mean fewer counties will be out of compliance. Also, other [air pollution](#) rules will likely ease the burden on counties and states by reducing smog-forming ground-level ozone as a side effect.

States would have up to 20 years to meet the new limits, or could face

federal penalties.

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Citation: US to propose stricter smog standard (2014, November 26) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-stricter-smog-standard.html>

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