

White House: Action needed now to slow climate change

June 22 2015, byMatthew Daly



President Barack Obama walks to board Marine One Friday, June 19, 2015, at the Santa Monica, Calif, landing zone en route to tape a podcast interview with comedian Marc Maron in Pasadena, Calif. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

Failure to act on climate change could cause an estimated 57,000 deaths a year in the United States from poor air quality by 2100, the Obama administration argued in a report released Monday that warns of dire effects of global warming.

The report says inaction on climate change could cost billions of dollars

a year in damage from rising sea levels, increased wildfires and drought, as well as higher costs for electricity to cool homes and businesses in hotter temperatures. The Environmental Protection Agency report argues that action now on climate could save billions in avoided costs for maintenance and repairs on roads and bridges made vulnerable by global warming and save the lives of an estimated 12,000 people in 49 U.S. cities who could die from extreme temperatures in 2100.

The report comes as Republicans in Congress seek to undo the administration's environmental policies, including an expected plan by the EPA to target coal-fired power plants, and days after Pope Francis issued a stern warning about global warming's consequences, especially for the poor and underdeveloped nations. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said last month was the hottest May around the globe in 136 years of global records.

A global health commission organized by the prestigious British medical journal Lancet recommended on Monday that substituting cleaner energy worldwide for coal will reduce air pollution and give Earth a better chance at avoiding dangerous climate change. The panel said hundreds of thousands of lives each year are at stake and global warming "threatens to undermine the last half century of gains in development and global health."

The White House report is part of a weeklong effort to emphasize climate change to mark the two-year anniversary of a "climate action plan" announced by President Barack Obama.

While the most severe effects of global warming would not be felt for decades, the Obama administration said decisions about climate change need to be made now.

"Decisions are not going to wait 50 years," EPA Administrator Gina

McCarthy told reporters at a White House briefing. "They are today's decisions."

McCarthy called the report "a wake-up call for some who may not be aware" of the potential damages of climate change.

Obama, in an interview out Monday with comedian Marc Maron for his popular podcast, said he was acting on his own on power plants and other environmental regulations because the GOP-controlled Congress has blocked more comprehensive efforts.

"We'll get that stuff done," Obama said, adding that "it would be a lot better, it would be a lot more helpful, if we had some cooperation from Congress, and if I didn't have the chairman of the energy and environment committee in the Senate holding up a snowball as if that was proof that climate change wasn't happening, that would be useful."

Obama's comments referred to Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, who tossed a snowball in the Senate chamber in February to demonstrate his claim that global warming is a hoax.

The EPA report says actions to slow climate change could save about \$3.1 billion in expected costs from sea-level rise and storm surge in 2100, while the power sector could save as much as \$34 billion by 2050 in avoided costs for additional electricity for air conditioning and other uses.

An estimated \$3 billion in avoided damages from poor water quality could be saved by 2100, the report said.

Actions begun in the next few years could reduce droughts by at least 40 percent by 2100 and save an estimated 6 to 8 million acres from being

burned by wildfires, the report said.

It said meaningful actions also could prevent the loss of about one-third of U.S. supplies of oysters, scallops and clams by 2100, as well as 35 percent of Hawaiian coral reefs.

Failure to act could lead to summers in Illinois to "feel like Louisiana" today, McCarthy said, while South Dakota summers may be as hot as those in Arkansas.

The Republican-controlled House is expected to vote this week on a bill to scale back the plan on coal-fired power plants, the centerpiece of Obama's second-term push to confront climate change.

The bill would allow states to opt out of the plan if the governor determines it would cause significant rate hikes for electricity or harm reliability of service in the state. The bill also would delay the rule until all court challenges are completed.

The House also is expected to take up a separate spending bill that would bar the EPA from enforcing the power plant rules, cut the agency's budget and attack other prominent EPA regulations on air and water pollution.

Obama has managed to thwart GOP efforts in the past, but Republicans are renewing their efforts now that they control the Senate as well as the House.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: White House: Action needed now to slow climate change (2015, June 22) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-06-white-house-action-climate.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.