

EPA moves to dramatically cut regulation of coal power

21 August 2018, by Ellen Knickmeyer And Seth Borenstein



In this July 27, 2018 photo, the Dave Johnson coal-fired power plant is silhouetted against the morning sun in Glenrock, Wyo. The Trump administration on Tuesday proposed a major rollback of Obama-era regulations on coal-fired power plants, striking at one of the former administration's legacy programs to rein in climate-changing fossil-fuel emissions. (AP Photo/J. David Ake)

The Trump administration moved to dismantle another major piece of President Barack Obama's environmental legacy on Tuesday, proposing to dramatically scale back restrictions on climate-changing emissions from coal-fired power plants even as it acknowledged that could lead to more premature deaths and serious illnesses.

The Trump plan broadly increases the authority given states to decide how and how much to regulate [coal power plants](#). The Environmental Protection Agency said the move "empowers states, promotes energy independence and facilitates economic growth and job creation."

Bill Wehrum, head of the EPA's air office, said the administration rejects any suggestion the agency has a broad legal duty to combat climate change through regulation of power grids or promotion of

cleaner energy.

"An important part of what we're doing here is getting us back into our lane," Wehrum said.

Environmentalists and other opponents said they expect legal challenges, arguing the Trump administration is abdicating its responsibilities under the Clean Air Act as set by Congress and the courts.

The Natural Resources Defense Council called the replacement proposal President Donald Trump's "Dirty Power Plan."

The Trump administration is emphasizing "coal at all costs," said Gina McCarthy, EPA administrator when the Obama plan was developed.

"There is no other country in the world that is looking at coal as its future—they are all running to clean energy to save money, create jobs and save lives today and protect our children's future. Climate change is real," McCarthy said in a statement.

EPA officials said they could give no firm projections for the health effects of the Trump administration replacement plan because that will depend on what states decide to do in regulating power plants within their borders.

But models provided by the agency estimate that under the Trump plan, 300 to 1,500 premature deaths would be avoided a year by 2030. The Obama plan says 1,500 and 3,600 [premature deaths](#) would be avoided.

The models for the Trump plan also project tens of thousands of additional major asthma attacks and hundreds more heart attacks compared with the Obama plan, which has been hung up in the courts.

EPA called the Obama-era regulations on coal

power plants "overly prescriptive and burdensome."

Combined with the EPA's proposal earlier this month to ease gas-mileage requirements for vehicles, the move may actually increase the country's climate-changing emissions, according to some former top EPA officials, environmental groups and other opponents.

Trump was expected to promote the new plan at a coal-country appearance in West Virginia on Tuesday. He made no direct mention of the EPA's announcement in the morning but ended a tweet about his upcoming trip by exclaiming, "CLEAN COAL!"

Tuesday's move opens a public-comment period on the proposal before any final approval by the president.



President Donald Trump speaks during an event to salute U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Monday, Aug. 20, 2018. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

Democratic Rep. Frank Pallone of New Jersey cited this summer's wildfires and increasing droughts and coastal flooding as evidence that man-made climate change from burning coal and other fossil fuels is already well upon the United States.

"Once again, this administration is choosing polluters' profits over public health and safety," he said.

Scientists say that without extensive study they cannot directly link a single weather event to [climate change](#), but that it is responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme events such as storms, droughts, floods and wildfires.

In a statement, Republican Sen. John Barrasso from the coal state of Wyoming welcomes the overhaul of the Obama administration's 2015 regulations, called the Clean Power Plan.

The new proposal establishes guidelines for states to use when developing any plans to limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. Critics say the new plan would allow utilities to run older, dirtier power plants more often and extend their operating life, undercutting potential environmental benefits.

Trump has already vowed to pull the U.S. out of the Paris climate agreement as he pushes to revive the coal industry. The Obama administration had worked to nudge the country's power producers toward natural gas, wind, solar and other less-polluting energy sources.

Trump also has directed Energy Secretary Rick Perry to take steps to bolster struggling coal-fired and nuclear power plants to keep them open, warning that impending retirements of such plants are harming the nation's electrical grid and reducing its resilience.

Obama's plan was designed to cut U.S. carbon dioxide emissions to 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. The rule dictated specific emission targets for states and gave officials broad latitude to decide how to achieve reductions.

The Supreme Court put the plan on hold in 2016 following a legal challenge by industry and coal-friendly states, an order that remains in effect.

Even so, the Obama plan has been a factor in the wave of retirements of coal-fired plants, which also are being squeezed by lower costs for natural gas

and renewable [power](#) and state mandates that promote energy conservation.

Trump has vowed to end what Republicans call a "war on coal" waged by Obama.

Michelle Bloodworth, president of the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, a trade group that represents coal producers, called the new rule a marked departure from the "gross overreach" of the Obama administration and said it should prevent a host of premature coal-plant retirements.

"We agree with those policymakers who have become increasingly concerned that coal retirements are a threat to grid resilience and national security," she said.

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