

Trump moves to weaken Obama climate policy, bolster coal industry

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The Trump administration on Wednesday unveiled its final plan to rewrite a major Obama-era climate change policy, replacing proposed regulations that cracked down on coal-burning power plants with a weaker alternative.

The administration's plan would gut the Clean Power Plan, a sweeping climate change policy to curb greenhouse gas emissions drafted under President Barack Obama. Stalled by the courts, the rule was never enacted.

Under Trump, the Environmental Protection Agency has branded the rewrite as the Affordable Clean Energy rule and designed it to fulfill the president's campaign promise to bring back the coal industry.

The new power plan does away with what had been aggressive nationwide goals for reducing the energy sector's carbon footprint. It relieves heavily on coal plants—the largest producers of carbon dioxide within the electricity industry.

The plan is also expected to lead to additional soot

and smog-forming emissions. According to the EPA's own analysis, it could lead to more cases of upper respiratory illness and cause an estimated 1,400 premature deaths each year by 2030.

While the former rule would have pushed utilities to shift their operations away from coal and toward cleaner-burning fuels, the Trump rule has been hailed by the [coal industry](#) as a move that would tilt the market back in its favor.

Energy experts don't think the rule can reverse coal's declines. Coal has been steadily losing its foothold in the American energy marketplace to cheaper natural gas and renewable sources like wind and solar.

Though the industry has blamed government regulations like the Clean Power Plan for making it noncompetitive, demand for coal has fallen without the Obama-era rule ever taking effect.

Environmentalists and climate-conscious states like California have said they are prepared to challenge the new rule, which could face an uphill battle in court. The Clean Air Act obligates the federal government to regulate [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and the Trump administration may have difficulty convincing the courts that its rule is the best way to do that.

"This is nothing more than an unlawful extension for [coal plants](#) masquerading as a climate rule," said Conrad Schneider, advocacy director at the Clean Air Task Force, an environmental advocacy group that's readying a lawsuit over the new rule. "They're trying to tie the hands of future administrations by issuing this do-nothing rule."

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