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# Morgantown City Council aims to lower greenhouse emissions

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By [Corey McDonald](#) | [0 comments](#)

A rule proposed last summer by the Environmental Protection Agency is driving entities in Morgantown toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions in order to meet the regulations imposed by the rule.



The rule, called the Clean Power Plan, relies on state and local governments to reduce emissions at coal fired power plants, one of the main sources of environmental pollution for the state of West Virginia.

The drafted plan offers a fair amount of flexibility concerning where emissions can be cut.

"What (the Clean Power Plan) does is that it provides a whole lot of flexibility so that you don't need to get the reductions at the plants themselves, but you could count the reductions elsewhere," said Evan Hansen, president of Downstream Strategies.

Downstream Strategies, a Morgantown consulting group that has been offering its environmental expertise to city officials and local residents since its founding, is one organization pushing toward reducing emissions from sources outside of coal fired power plants while finding ways to improve on energy efficiency.

They plan on achieving this through untapped energy sources, such as solar energy, that have the potential to benefit small businesses and home owners in Morgantown.

"We're helping to organize a solar cooperative in the community," Hansen said. "What that means is that a group of business owners and home owners join together and they solicit a bid for solar installers."

This group discount cuts the price for solar installation down significantly.

"Typically, when these arrangements have been made in other cities you get about a 25 percent discount on solar installation, because you're buying in bulk," Hansen said.

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Downstream Strategies is also formulating plans to work with local landlords, according to Hansen. This would allow a company to install demand reduction devices on hot water tanks on the properties.

What these devices do is shut off the tank for ten minutes a day via wireless signal during a time of day where the resident would not notice.

"Landlords who agree to install these will get \$100 a year per hot water heater and then they can use that money to build a solar system on their roof which would then provide essentially free electricity for a couple decades," Hansen said. "(This model) shows great promise for multi-family homes here."

Hansen believes the system will be especially appealing to citizens and business owners alike, due to the low prices of the units.

"These types of solutions make a lot of sense because they're cost effective; people and businesses will save money," Hansen said. "And there's so much potential because so little has been done in Morgantown and West Virginia in general."

Downstream Strategies has also been involved with City Council.

"City Council and the city staff are supporting the efforts but not through funding or ordinances. I would call it a partnership," Hansen said.

City Council has been addressing this issue for some time. In 2007 the Mayor of Morgantown signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, pledging the city's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2008 they also entered into an energy savings performance contract with Constellation Energy. The company installed a number of energy efficiency measures into city buildings that guaranteed the city would get certain savings.

The final draft of the Clean Power Plan's rule is expected to be released toward the end of the summer.

"If the final rule looks like the draft rule, which nobody knows until it comes out, there's going to be an emission target that's tailored to each state and you need to reach that final emission target by 2030," Hansen

said.

According to Hansen, problems may arise when the final rule of the plan is released. It is expected to face a fair amount of legal challenges by the State Legislature.

There was already a significant lawsuit against the rule by the legislature previously, however the court ruled they needed to wait for the final rule to be issued.

"What's controversial is that the state needs to come up with an implementation plan that is then approved by the federal EPA," Hansen said. "If they choose not to submit a state implementation plan, which seems to be the indications, then the federal EPA will issue their own implementation plan for West Virginia, which is usually frowned upon because it would be better to have local people making the plan."

The final rule may not have many flexibilities as to how local governments can reduce emissions, and may demand that the reductions come directly from the intended source: coal fired power plants.

"The legislature passed a law a few months ago that limits the flexibility and what can be in West Virginia's state plan, and if you read that law strictly it limits it to inside-the-fence-line solutions, where you can only take action at coal fired power plants themselves and you can't improve energy efficiency," Hansen said. "You can't install renewable energy, you can't do all the flexibility that the EPA built into the rule."

Hansen fears that the "inside the fence line" solutions found in the West Virginia law will make it impossible for the state to meet the emission levels necessary for the EPA.

"You simply can't meet the clean power plan with inside the fence solutions," Hansen said.

In West Virginia, 95 percent of the electricity generated comes from coal fired power plants, and Hansen believes state leaders seem intent on keeping it that way.

"That's what it's all about at the state level, sue the EPA and try and protect the coal industry, but in reality it does a disservice to people who live here," Hansen said. "Most other states have a much more diversified electricity generation mix which keeps the cost down and you're not tied to a single commodity like coal."

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