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Carbon Regulations

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Downstream Strategies, WVU Center to Work on EPA Regulation Report

By [BEN ADDUCCHIO](#) (/PEOPLE/BEN-ADDUCCHIO)[Listen](#)

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West Virginia University's Center for Energy and Sustainable Development is working with Downstream Strategies on a new report, analyzing how West Virginia can best meet new Environmental Protection Agency proposals on carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. This study will be used to advise policy makers as they draft strategies to submit to the EPA.



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wvwn/files/201403/01-us-largest-coal-fired-power-plant-890.jpg>)

West Virginia has two years to come up with a plan, to cut its carbon emissions.
Credit Robb Kendrick / National Geographic

This report will be completed over the course of the next year. The state Department of Environmental Protection has two years to submit a plan to EPA, which will present its proposals for cutting state carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. It won't be easy, as the majority of the state's energy production comes from coal. The EPA wants to cut carbon emissions by 30 percent over the next 16 years, from 2005 carbon levels. Evan Hansen with Downstream Strategies says West Virginia's levels need to decrease about 20 percent, according to EPA proposals.

"What's important to realize is that a 20 percent reduction in carbon emissions doesn't mean we would be mining 20 percent less coal or losing 20 percent of our coal jobs," said Hansen.

"There's so much flexibility in this rule and it means that it can be achieved in many different ways. Coal production will continue. For example, electricity generation can shift towards natural gas or toward renewable energy systems. There are provisions to increase energy efficiency towards homes and businesses, that counts towards the carbon dioxide reductions."

Hansen's organization Downstream Strategies, along with the West Virginia University Center for Energy and Sustainable Development, is compiling information in a report, to give to state policy makers like the DEP, on how West Virginia can meet these EPA proposals. This includes looking at emissions data from all of the state's coal-fired

power plants, as well as researching what rules and regulations on the books might be helpful, or obstructive, to getting these emission cuts done. James Van Nostrand works for the center for energy and sustainable development at WVU.

"I think the studies that are out there indicate that energy efficiency is the probably the lowest cost compliance option. We have a very poor record on efficiency," he said.

"These would be utilities offering programs to help customers control their energy bills, whether they be residential customers, commercial customers, or industrial customers. It's basically paying customers for saving kilowatt hours that don't have to be generated by generating plants."

The EPA's newly proposed regulations are the first enforcement standards ever set on carbon emissions. When they were announced, West Virginia's leaders viewed them with caution, anxiety, and trepidation. Most were extremely disappointed. Van Nostrand says some other states, including coal states like Kentucky, have already begun to develop strategies to cut carbon emissions. Van Nostrand says West Virginia is not as far ahead as it probably should be.

"I don't think we have positioned ourselves very well thus far to achieve compliance with these rules. A lot of states have moved forward aggressively with respect to diversifying their energy supply," he said.

Nationally, carbon emissions and how to deal with them have become a politically charged issue. Democrats and Republicans alike struck down a cap and trade proposal in the United States Congress about five years ago, when funding was also on the table for new clean coal technology practices like carbon capture and storage. Van Nostrand says the lack of Congressional collaboration forced the hand of President Obama to direct the EPA's movement on carbon emission regulation.

"The President is using his executive authority to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act; it's kind of a blunt instrument, it's not the best way to do it. But in the absence of Congress coming up with some kind of federal program, it's not an ideal solution but it's the only way the President was able to do it," he said.

The EPA has scheduled four public meetings to discuss these proposals. They are planned for the last week of July, in Pittsburgh, Washington D.C., Atlanta and Denver. The report will be done by next June.

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