

**Title: EPA Rule Would Spell End of the Dirty Coal Age**

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is mulling a common-sense rule that, for the first time, would set caps on the carbon pollutants that future fossil fuel-fired power plants may lawfully emit. Carbon dioxide emissions from new plants would be limited to 1,000 pounds per megawatt-hour. This would essentially provide the unceremonious end to the age of dirty coal.

The proposed standard would allow future plants to burn fossil fuels to generate electricity, but only if they're natural gas plants, which would comply easily, or coal plants that rely on new, costly technologies that reduce carbon emissions.

The Sierra Club, which promotes a more responsible use of the Earth's ecosystems and resources, reports that 22 coal-fired power plants are on the drawing board in the U.S. If they go online, the organization contends, they would add a staggering 220 billion pounds of carbon pollution to the atmosphere annually, contributing significantly to climate change. The EPA's proposed rule would reduce that output by 123 billion pounds.

While environmentalists applaud the EPA's pending action, coal industry lobbyists argue that the agency has declared war on their commodity, a reliable and abundant energy source and the mainstay of local economies throughout the nation. Political foes accuse President Barack Obama of driving up energy prices, weakening national security and killing American jobs. Other naysayers observe that while natural gas is cheap and plentiful, utilities have no economic incentive to build coal-fired plants requiring expensive technology.

Already, the Taylorville Energy Center, deep in the coal fields of Illinois, has sidelined its ambitious plan to cook coal into methane, capture the carbon dioxide released in the process and burn the methane in a conventional natural gas-style power plant.

The aborted Taylorville initiative was criticized because it required tax subsidies—ultimately they were denied—and because Illinois is a net exporter of energy to other states. Taylorville's chief competitor, Exelon Corp., saw no reason for the state's taxpayers to subsidize a \$3.5 billion facility that would scrub coal of its impurities before turning it into gas and burning it to create electricity, when burning conventional natural gas would cost one-third as much.

If the additional cost to produce clean coal gives natural gas a greater competitive advantage as the fuel of choice or, better still, encourages utilities to invest instead in renewable electricity generated by the sun and wind, no one should object. The EPA must move forward with carbon regulation and check the greenhouse gas that threatens our health and the sustainability of our planet.



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