EPA to Reduce New Power Plants' Carbon Pollution

DINA CAPPIELLO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration will press ahead on Tuesday with the first-ever limits on heat-trapping pollution from new power plants, ignoring protests from Republicans who have said the regulation will raise electricity prices and kill off coal, a dominant U.S. energy source.

But the proposal, which was outlined to the Associated Press by administration officials, also will fall short of environmentalists' hopes because it goes easier than it could have on coal-fired power — one of the largest sources of the gases blamed for global warming. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they did not want to pre-empt the official announcement.

Older coal-fired power plants have already been shutting down across the country, thanks to low natural gas prices, demand from China and weaker demand for electricity. But regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency on controlling pollution downwind and toxic emissions have helped push some into retirement, causing Republicans in Congress and on the campaign trail to claim the agency will cause blackouts. Numerous studies and an AP survey of power plant operators have shown that is not the case.

The proposed rule will not apply to existing power plants or new ones built in the next year. It will also give future coal-fired power plants years to meet the standard, because it will eventually require that carbon pollution be captured and stored underground. That technology is not yet commercially available.

A new natural gas-fired power plant would meet the new standard without installing additional controls.

The regulation, which was due to be released last July, stemmed from a settlement with environmental groups and states. The government already controls global warming pollution at the largest industrial sources, has proposed standards for new vehicles and is working on regulations to reduce greenhouse gases at existing power plants and refineries.

Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, an environmental advocacy group fighting coal-fired power, said in an interview that the regulation shows that President Barack Obama is moving to a cleaner energy future.

"It's a strong move," Brune said. "It means there will never be another coal plant built without new technology and it probably means even those won't be built because they can't compete."

But Republicans said the new rule could not come at a worse time, with concern about high gasoline prices and energy taking center stage in the presidential election.

"At a time when the Obama administration should be working to lower the price of gas at the pump, it is alarming that they have put forward more global warming regulations," said Matt Dempsey, a spokesman for Oklahoma Sen. James Inhofe, the top Republican on the Senate environment panel. "Republicans are committed to ensuring that the Obama-EPA is finally reined in."

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