

President Obama's Climate Action Plan

The Essentials

- In June, 2013 President Obama released his Climate Action Plan.
- The Plan has three broad categories.
 - First, **reducing U.S. carbon emissions**. The President's plan sets goals to reduce emissions from existing power plants, modernize the U.S. transportation sector, increase the U.S. clean energy portfolio, and increase energy efficiency in American homes and businesses.
 - Second, **preparing the U.S. for the impacts of climate change**. This is done by supporting climate-resilient investments, responding to major weather events, creating sustainable and resilient hospitals, maintaining agriculture productivity, and providing the tools for climate resilience.
 - Finally, **engaging the world's major economies to advance key climate priorities** and in galvanizing global action through international climate negotiations.
- What does this mean for Arizona?
 - It is hard to predict the full ramifications of the President's climate action plan for any given state. Arizona's utilities and energy regulators will have to plan based on new federal regulations, such as the EPA's current proposed caps on carbon emissions for new power plants. Additionally, Arizona could see more federal funds become available to support sustainable agriculture or solar power. As of now, the exact cost-benefit may be impossible to gauge.

Introduction

In June 2013, President Barak Obama issued his [Climate Action Plan](#) ("The Plan"), because "climate change is no longer a distant threat." Citing already observed rises in sea level, increased costs of weather disasters, worsening droughts, and record breaking changes in global high temperature averages, the President stated that our country has a moral obligation to future generations to address climate change through mitigation and adaptation measures.

The Plan sets broad federal climate action strategies, organized around three key principles: (1) reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, (2) adapting the U.S. to the impacts of climate change, and (3) leading global efforts aimed at stabilizing the Earth's climate. The first two goals are largely in line with state and local governments' efforts to adopt climate action plans or renewable energy portfolios. To ensure collaboration across different levels of government, President Obama established the State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force to coordinate federal efforts with those already underway in local communities.

Reducing U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

a. Reducing emissions from power plants

Power plants account for roughly [one-third of all GHG emissions in the United States](#). To curb emissions from new and existing power plants, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [proposed emission standards](#) for new power plants in April 2012. After receiving over 2.5 million public comments, the EPA [revised its proposed emission standards](#) and re-proposed rules from new plants on September 20, 2013. The proposed standards are [not expected to dramatically reduce U.S. GHG emissions](#) because they only apply to new power plants. Under [Section 111\(d\)](#) of the Clean Air Act (1970) however, the EPA has authority to similarly regulate existing sources after regulations for new sources are finalized. Regulation of existing sources is expected to [significantly reduce U.S. GHG emissions](#). The EPA is expected to issue its proposed standards for existing sources in [June 2014](#).

b. Deploying Renewable Energy

The Plan sets a goal to [double renewable electricity generation capacity in the U.S by 2020](#). To accomplish this goal, the President has directed agencies such as the Department of Interior to streamline “clean energy” permitting. The Department of Interior is directed to permit an additional 10 gigawatts of renewable energy facilities, including utility scale solar facilities, wind farms, and geothermal plants by 2020. Further, the Plan seeks to support renewable energy by expanding and modernizing the electric grid to meet the needs of renewable facilities. The Plan also seeks to [encourage investment in clean energy technologies](#), like advanced biofuels, cleaner coal, and emerging nuclear technologies – including small modular reactors – by allocating up to \$8 billion in federal money for clean energy loans to be dispersed by the Department of Energy.

Finally, the Plan strives to further reduce U.S. GHG emissions by [developing and implementing energy efficiency](#) measures in homes, businesses, factories, and transportation. This includes setting post-2018 fuel economy standards for vehicles, establishing new energy efficiency standards for appliances (dishwashers, refrigerators,

The EPA’s revised standards would set the following emission limits for new power plants:

- For coal and other non-natural gas fossil fuel-fired plants the proposed limits are:
 - 1,100 lbs CO₂/MWh over a 12-operating month period, or
 - 1,000-1,050 lbs CO₂/MWh gross over an 84-operating month (7 year) period.
- For natural gas-fired power plants, the proposed limits are:
 - 1,000 lbs CO₂/MWh gross for larger units (capacity > 850 mmBtu/hr).
 - 1,100 lbs CO₂/MWh gross for smaller units (capacity ≤ 850 mmBtu/hr).

These limits will have a significant impact on coal plants, which the U.S. relies on for 42% of its electricity. The average U.S. coal-fired power plant emits between 1,800 and 2,250 lbs CO₂/MWh. The EPA expects the emission reductions to be accomplished by Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CCS). However, many argue that CCS technology is not yet commercially viable. The impacts for natural gas-fired power plants will be less significant. The average U.S. natural gas facility emits between 800 and 1,150 lbs CO₂/MWh.

etc.), enhancing energy efficiency in buildings 20% by 2020, and spurring investment through federal loan guarantees.

Preparing the U.S. for the Impacts of Climate Change

In 2009, shortly after coming into office, President Obama established the [Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force](#). More than [20 Federal agencies](#) served on the Task Force which was co-chaired by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Task Force was established to [analyze and recommend federal policies](#) and practices aimed at adapting the U.S. to climate change. In February of 2013, based on the Task Force's recommendations, Federal agencies began releasing [Climate Change Adaptation Plans](#) "outlining strategies to reduce the vulnerability of Federal programs, assets, and investments to the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise or more frequent severe extreme weather." With a wide range of agencies involved, the Climate Adaptation Plans address everything from protecting natural resources to responding to emergencies. On November 1, 2013, the President signed another [Executive Order](#) disbanding the Task Force and guiding Federal agencies to continue to follow the Task Force's Recommendations.

To ensure collaboration with State, Local, and Tribal government efforts to adapt to climate change, the Climate Action Plan established the [State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force](#) on Climate Preparedness and Resilience. The State Local and Tribal Leaders Task Force is a short-term task force established to ensure Federal agency actions are in-line with and supplemental to State, Local, and Tribal activities. The Task Force is [mandated to report](#) its findings to relevant stakeholders by early November 2014.

Leading International Efforts to Address Global Climate Change

The final prong of the Plan focuses on [engaging the international community](#), through bilateral and multilateral channels, to reduce future GHG emissions, promote sustainable and efficient technologies, enhance carbon sinks through reforestation, and mobilize international climate finance. The President's international efforts are particularly focused on major emerging and GHG emitting economies, such as China, India, and Brazil. In 2009, the President launched the [Major Economies Forum](#) on Energy and Climate, which brings together 17 countries that account for roughly 75 percent of global GHG emissions. The Climate Action Plan represents the next step in promoting action among the Major Economies Forum members and disseminating the work of the Forum into ongoing international negotiations held under the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) and other multilateral and bilateral channels.

Learn more

- **Find the full text of the Climate Action Plan here:**
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/image/president27climateactionplan.pdf>
- **The White House's Climate Action Plan Fact Sheet is here:**
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/25/fact-sheet-president-obama-s-climate-action-plan>
- **For an in-depth analysis of the EPA's proposed greenhouse gas emission standards for new power plants, see this report from the Congressional Research Service:** <http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R43127.pdf>
- **More information on Carbon Capture and Sequestration can be found here:**
<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/ccs/>