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Civic Engagement Around EPA’s Proposed Clean Power Plan

At the 2015 Emerging Issues Forum, Innovation Reconstructed, IEI released its 2015 North Carolina Civic Health Index. The report uses several measures to show levels of engagement by North Carolina residents with their communities, and makes the connection between engaged citizens and opportunities for collective problem solving. This is why IEI prioritizes having stakeholders collaborate to address emerging issues. When everyone rolls up their sleeves together, solving a daunting problem becomes far more likely, and the process far more manageable.

In this vein, IEI recently partnered with the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association, the North Carolina Clean Energy Technology Center, E4 Carolinas, the Research Triangle Cleantech Cluster, and Advanced Energy to talk about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) proposed Clean Power Rule and its implications for North Carolina. The meeting organizers hoped that the convening of roughly 90 stakeholders would identify collective concerns about the proposed rule as well as opportunities to address the likely components of a final rule.

Proceedings

Read the proceedings from IEI’s convening on the implications of EPA’s proposed Clean Power Plan for North Carolina.

Featured Study

Read Duke University’s study about possible implications of Clean Power Plan targets in North Carolina.

Featured News

The California Air Resources Board Chief discusses possible changes to EPA’s Clean Power Plan.
Discussion of the proposed Clean Power Plan

Because greenhouse gases are not listed in the Clean Air Act, the EPA relied on a little-used Section of the Act, 111(d), which regulates pre-existing stationary sources of pollutants found to endanger public health and welfare. The Agency’s proposed carbon rule is the most significant change in the electricity sector in decades, requiring states to develop plans to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from existing fossil-fueled power plants.

In its Clean Power Plan, EPA developed a 2030 emission rate goal for each state, with interim goals that the state must meet between 2020 and 2029. Comments about the rule were due last December and over four million comments were filed, making the proposed rule one of the most contentious the Agency has developed. EPA is currently going through the comments and they recently announced that a final rule would be issued mid-summer 2015, with state compliance due by summer 2016.

The power sector has capital-intensive assets with long lifespans, and it requires extensive, highly detailed planning and coordination to make changes. States that choose to wait until the Clean Power Plan becomes final may find it difficult to develop a thoughtful plan. In addition, the federal government is prepared to step in with its own federal implementation plan if states decide to sit tight and do nothing. North Carolina forum attendees were uniform in their view that we are better off with a state-developed compliance plan than one imposed directly by the EPA.

Our convening determined that North Carolina has a series of major decisions to make with regard to compliance:
• Should we develop a single-state or multi-state compliance plan?
• Should Duke Energy retire additional coal fired power plants, even though North Carolina customers have already paid for costly upgrades under the state’s Clean Smokestacks Act? If the utility does retire plants early, are ratepayers responsible for paying these stranded costs?
• How should North Carolina determine the trajectory of the emission reductions for the interim period (2020-2029)?
• What are the different compliance scenarios that North Carolina could feasibly implement?

All of these questions need input from the state’s energy decision makers and feedback from interested stakeholders. At the March 13th forum, participants heard from leaders in South Carolina and Kentucky regarding the stakeholder engagement processes they have developed to respond to the proposed Clean Power Plan. Their advice to North Carolina included the need for a diverse stakeholder group to shape potential compliance in a genuine way, the importance of coordinating individual in-state plans with other collaborative ventures (such as Kentucky who is participating in the Midwestern Power Sector Collaborative), and the importance of an adequate timeline to develop a plan that is not flawed.

As the state moves to consider its response to the Clean Power Plan, state leaders should incorporate some of the key lessons from our 2015 North Carolina Civic Health Index Report. A connected, diverse, and engaged community or stakeholder group is ultimately more innovative and successful than those who are disengaged or dominated by the opinions of a select group.

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