



Proposal to join regional cap-and-trade program draws 13,000 comments

Rachel McDevitt 

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Thousands of people weighed in on Pennsylvania's proposal to join a regional effort to curb carbon dioxide emissions.

The Department of Environmental Protection now must read the more than 13,000 comments on its draft rule to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and use them to inform its final regulation.

Other regulations proposed last year didn't get nearly the same response. A proposed rule for emissions from the oil and gas

industry attracted about 4,600 comments.

Under the program, power plants will have to pay for each ton of carbon they emit. The money can be invested in things like clean energy and energy efficiency.

Environmental groups claim there's overwhelming support for the rule, which they say will be a big step in addressing climate change.

PennEnvironment said it rallied 3,000 activists and volunteers and worked with 30 state lawmakers to show support.

"The public comment period just makes it clear that Pennsylvanians are really clamoring for concrete action to reduce climate pollution," said Flora Cardoni, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center's field director.

Opponents to RGGI say it won't effectively reduce pollution and will kill jobs in coal-related industries.

Rachel Gleason, with the opposition coalition Power PA Jobs Alliance, said the all-online format for public comment shut out people who don't have reliable internet service, which includes people whose local economies depend on coal fired power plants.

"Greene County barely even has broadband access," Gleason said. "The virtual public hearings were a great disservice to the communities that will be impacted that are largely more rural Pennsylvania."

DEP says all comments, whether written or verbal, are given the same weight.

While the formal public comment period is now over, DEP committees that evaluate regulations accept public comments during regular meetings. Legislative committees may also hold hearings on the RGGI process.

The agency plans to present a revised rule to advisory committees this spring and have a final rule by the end of the year. The Wolf Administration hopes to join RGGI in 2022.

EXPLAINERS

Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative

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