

Frequently Asked Questions about the “Clean Power Plant Act of 2001”

How is this bill different from other proposals to limit emissions from electric generating units?

Most of the major proposals to limit emissions from electric generation, including the proposals by Rep. Waxman and Sen. Jeffords, rely on a cap and trade system for sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions (pollutants which contribute to acid rain and ozone smog). Such proposals limit overall emissions, but allow dirtier plants to continue polluting at high rates by purchasing emissions credits from cleaner plants. The Allen bill takes a plant by plant approach, setting uniform emissions standards for all power plants, no matter when they began operation.

The Allen bill is the only proposal that closes the loophole exempting utilities from regulations on Hazardous Air Pollutants. The Allen bill is also the only proposal that ensures all mercury captured from emissions or contained in combustion waste will be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

Why doesn't the Allen bill allow emissions credit trading?

While a cap and trade approach can limit overall emissions, it may not protect northeast states from the pollution of downwind plants, or completely remove the economic advantage of dirty utilities. The Allen bill sets all plants on a level playing field, ensuring that clean energy can compete in an open market, and preventing downwind plants from enjoying an economic advantage while their pollution travels to upwind states.

Allowing older plants to purchase pollution credits also hurts the communities immediately surrounding those plants. The local effects of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury can be severe. In fact, because of the grandfathered plants in the Ohio River Valley, its residents are exposed to higher average smog levels than people living in Chicago or Boston.

On what are the bill's emissions limits based?

The overall cap on carbon dioxide emissions is consistent with the Rio Treaty on Global Climate Change, which was signed by the Bush administration and ratified by the Senate.

The 1.5 pounds per megawatt hour emissions rate for nitrogen oxide and the 3 pounds per megawatt hour for sulfur dioxide are consistent with what new coal-fired plants built over the past decade have been required to meet. These rates can be achieved with current technology, and EPA has proposed that the 1.5 lbs/MWH rate should be required for all new plants.

The 70 percent reduction in mercury emissions is what EPA determined could be achieved with currently available technology in its March 1999 report on emissions reductions from the electric power industry. As technology improves, however, the bill allows EPA to increase the amount of mercury that must be removed from power plant emissions.