

CLIMATE CHANGE

EPA to seek to cut power plant carbon by one-third

By Dina Cappiello
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration today will roll out a plan to cut earth-warming pollution from power plants by 30 percent by 2030, setting in motion one of the most significant actions to address global warming in U.S. history.

The rule, which is expected to be final next year, will set the first national limits on carbon dioxide, the chief gas linked to global warming from the nation's power plants. They are the largest source of greenhouse gases in the U.S., accounting for about a third of the annual emissions that make the U.S. the second-largest

contributor to global warming on the planet.

The regulation is a centerpiece of President Barack Obama's plans to reduce the pollution linked to global warming, a step that the administration hopes will get other countries to act when negotiations on a new international treaty resume next year.

"The purpose of this rule is to really close the loophole on carbon pollution, reduce emissions as we've done with lead, arsenic and mercury and improve the health of the American people and unleash a new economic opportunity," said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council, which has drafted a plan that informed the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency proposal.

Yet the rule carries significant political and legal risks by further diminishing coal's role in producing U.S. electricity. Once the dominant source of energy in the U.S., coal now supplies just under 40 percent of the nation's electricity, as it has been replaced by booming supplies of natural gas and renewable sources such as wind and solar.

Hal Quinn, president of the National Mining Association, said Sunday that the regulation is "really designed to drive out low-cost electricity and replace it with higher-cost, more expensive and less reliable electricity." The White House said Obama called a group of

Democrats from both the House and Senate on Sunday to thank them for their support in advance of the rule's official release, which is expected to be rigorously attacked by Republicans and make Democrats up for reelection in energy-producing states nervous.

EPA data shows that the nation's power plants have reduced carbon dioxide emissions by nearly 13 percent since 2005, or about halfway to the goal the administration will set Monday. But with coal-fired power plants already beleaguered by cheap natural gas prices and other environmental regulations, experts on Sunday said getting there won't be easy. The EPA is expected to offer a range of options to states to

meet targets that will based on where they get their electricity and how much carbon dioxide they emit in the process.

The options include making power plants more efficient, reducing the frequency at which coal-fired power plants supply power to the grid, and investing in more renewable, low-carbon sources of energy. In addition, states could enhance programs aimed at reducing demand by making households and businesses more energy-efficient.

Obama has already tackled the emissions from the nation's cars and trucks, announcing rules to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by doubling fuel economy. That standard will reduce

carbon dioxide by more than 2 billion tons over the life of vehicles made in model years 2012 to 2025. The power plant proposal will prevent about 430 million tons of carbon dioxide from reaching the atmosphere, based on the 30 percent figure and what power plants have already reduced since 2005.

The EPA refused to confirm the details of the proposal Sunday. People familiar with the proposal shared the details on condition of anonymity, since they have not been officially released. Beinecke and Quinn spoke Sunday on ABC's "This Week" before details of the proposal became public. The proposal was first reported Sunday by The Wall Street Journal.