

## ENVIROS SAY PROPOSED DEP CAP ON CARBON POLLUTION FROM POWER PLANTS NOT ENOUGH

TOM JOHNSON | JANUARY 28, 2019

Concern that rejoining multi-state greenhouse-gas initiative won't do much good unless New Jersey demands more stringent pollution controls



For years, clean-energy advocates have pressed to get New Jersey back into a multi-state initiative to slash greenhouse-gas emissions from power plants, a step the Murphy administration has embraced.

With the state moving to rejoin the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative next year, however, a new question is emerging: Will rejoining it do any good?

Perhaps not. At least that is what state Department of Environmental Protection officials were told Friday as environmentalists and climate advocates urged the agency to clamp down much more strongly on carbon pollution from power plants than would occur under a new DEP cap on emissions.

The DEP proposed a cap of 18 million tons in 2020, far in excess of the cap of 12.6 million tons of carbon dioxide sought by most environmental groups. “The proposed reductions need to be greater, sooner and more targeted,” said David Pringle, a consultant for Clean Water Action, echoing a theme mentioned by others.

Bruce Ho, a senior advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said his organization’s modeling suggested that if the cap is set too high it would undermine climate progress not only in New Jersey but throughout the RGGI region.

### Increased emissions from dirtier plants elsewhere?

The **multi-state initiative**, a collaboration of nine states in the region, is a cap-and-trade program placing a tax on carbon emissions, which is eventually passed on to utility customers. New Jersey pulled out of the program in 2012 under former Gov. Chris Christie, who called it ineffective and a tax on ratepayers.

Paul Baldauf, an assistant commissioner at DEP, defended the proposed cap, saying if it was any lower, it would increase emissions from dirtier power plants outside the RGGI region, not subject to the cap-and-trade limits. The problem, dubbed “leakage,” is an issue states within RGGI have struggled with since its inception. “We know it’s an issue,” Baldauf said.

In the deregulated energy marketplace, power plants are called on to supply electricity to the grid based on the lowest cost. If cheaper and more polluting power plants in other states are selected by the regional power grid, it could offset the gains imposed by RGGI power plants.

That is what preliminary modeling by Gabel Associates, a well-regarded energy consulting firm in Highland Park, has shown, according to Adrian Kimbrough, a vice president of the firm and representing independent energy producers. Under the modeling, any emission reductions gained

by New Jersey joining RGGI would be offset by increased carbon pollution from neighboring states, he said.

#### **A call for mandatory reductions in certain areas**

“If New Jersey doesn’t address leakage, emissions will rise,” Kimbrough said, leading to more pollution “from dirtier generators in non-RGGI states.” Greenhouse-gas emissions will increase unless the state adopts a mitigation plan before rejoining RGGI, he said.

Others who spoke at the DEP hearing called on the state to adopt mandatory reductions in emissions for environmental justice communities, those areas already burdened with more pollution than other municipalities.

“There is no guarantee we’re getting the reductions where most of the pollution occurs,” said Nicky Sheats of the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance.

The proposed cap only deals with emissions from current power plants, not new ones. That caused concern among some advocates who note new natural-gas plants have been proposed in the Meadowlands, Pinelands and Highlands, among other regions.

