

Fact Sheet: What the Senate Must Do to Pass a Strong Climate Bill August 2009

The American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACESA or “ACES,” H.R. 2454), as passed by the House of Representatives, provides insufficient greenhouse emissions reductions through an untested and loophole filled cap-and-trade system. At the same time, the bill repeals important provisions of the Clean Air Act, facilitating the construction of outdated, dirty coal fired power plants and other pollution sources.

We need the companion climate change bill that will emerge from the Senate to

- set an overall cap of no more than 350 ppm CO₂;
- save the Clean Air Act— remove the Clean Air Act Waivers from the bill; and
- eliminate or reduce the use of offsets and other loopholes, to ensure the integrity of the adopted emissions reduction system.

The ACESA’s Greenhouse Gas Reduction Goals Are Too Weak

Leading scientists warn that CO₂ levels must be reduced to below 350 ppm to avoid catastrophic climate impacts. President Obama and G8 leaders have also agreed to limit global warming to 2° C. But, even if ACES were fully implemented with complete success, it would not reduce CO₂ to below 350 ppm, but would allow CO₂eq concentrations to rise to more than 450 ppm, giving us less than a 50-50 chance of limiting warming to 2° C and avoiding catastrophic impacts. Flipping a coin to determine the fate of our children and our planet is unacceptable.

Leading climate scientists also warn that building more coal fired plants will make it impossible to achieve the overall emissions reductions scientifically necessary to avert disaster, yet the ACESA actually facilitates the construction of new coal plants. The 50 coal plants currently in permitting or construction would add 250 million metric tons of CO₂eq per year if completed. That’s more than the combined annual emissions of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

The ACESA’s Clean Air Act Rollbacks Move Us in the Wrong Direction

The Clean Air Act has protected the air we breathe for four decades. It is our strongest existing tool for reducing greenhouse pollution. The ACESA *repeals* important pollution reduction authority under the Clean Air Act, facilitating the construction of coal fired power plants. Any efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must be *in addition to*, not *instead of*, the Clean Air Act.

The Clean Air Act Works. The Clean Air Act Saves Lives. According to the EPA, in 2010, the Clean Air Act will save 23,000 lives and prevent 1.7 million asthma attacks, 4.1 million lost work days, and over 68,000 hospitalizations and emergency room visits.

The Clean Air Act Saves Money and Protects our Economy. In its first two decades alone, the Act provided benefits including decreased healthcare costs and reduced lost work time worth \$22.2 trillion. These benefits exceed the estimated costs of regulation by 42 times.

The ACESA Guts the Clean Air Act. Under the Clean Air Act's new source performance standards and new source review programs, new coal-fired power plants and other pollution sources must be built, if at all, with meaningful greenhouse emissions-reduction requirements. Under the criteria air pollutant program, EPA must set national air quality standards to protect the public health and welfare. The ACESA (sections 331 and 116) eliminates these and other protections, allowing hundreds of millions of tons of additional greenhouse pollution from coal-fired power plants and other sources. All Existing Clean Air Act authority must be retained, and strengthened, by adding deadlines for the oldest and dirtiest coal fired power plants to meet pollution reduction requirements.

Sometimes the inadequacies of the ACESA are downplayed with statements such as "Any bill, even a flawed one, is better than no bill at all," or "We need to pass something to bring to the international climate talks in Copenhagen in December" or "This is the best the best we can do right now." Under the existing Clean Air Act, we have the tools to reduce greenhouse emissions today. This bill will actually make things worse by eliminating the Clean Air Act's critical safety net.

The ACESA Allows the Expansion of Outdated, Deadly Coal-fired Power Plants

The ACESA represents a major victory for the coal industry and gives a continued free ride for the largest polluters that America cannot afford.

Coal-fired power plants are the single largest contributor to U.S. greenhouse pollution, spewing nearly 2,000 million metric tons of CO₂eq in 2007, or 27 percent of total U.S. emissions, and the ACESA allows the continued construction of these plants. Chairman Waxman said, "If this overall bill becomes law, the business decisions that will be made will be to build new power plants burning coal. Now, that ought to be good news for those from the coal areas and for the utilities that want to use coal in the future."

The ACESA would allow new and existing coal fired power plants to operate without any additional pollution controls for a decade or more. The law would actually weaken existing pollution control rules for coal plants and other facilities like oil refineries and cement plants.

Coal is an outdated, dirty, and dangerous form of energy. In addition to being the largest greenhouse polluter, the coal industry is the largest emitter of sulfur dioxide pollution, causing acid rain and smog, the largest emitter of NO_x pollution, and the largest emitter of deadly mercury pollution. 12,000 coal miners died from black lung disease between 1992 and 2002, and to date more than 1,200 miles of streams have been buried or polluted in Appalachia from mountaintop removal mining.

Congress Must Pass a Strong Bill that Actually Solves the Climate Crisis

We recognize the massive political effort that is necessary to pass climate legislation, but a bill with inadequate targets, rollbacks of our flagship environmental laws and loophole ridden mechanisms will move us in the wrong direction.

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