

# THE HILL

## Strengthen power plan rules to avoid climate haymaker



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OP-ED

By Kevin Bundy  
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Think of it as history's biggest haymaker — after a decadeslong windup, sea-level rise is gearing up to clobber American coastal cities from Miami to D.C., as two recent scientific warnings make clear.

First came the federal National Climate Assessment's disturbing finding that global warming is already increasing dangers from floods and Hurricane Sandy-style storm surges.

Then came two studies showing that huge Antarctica glacier clusters have started a

long-term collapse that could cause far greater sea-level increases.

So why isn't President Obama proposing a more serious solution to the greenhouse gas emissions from our nation's power plants — the largest source of the pollutants disrupting our climate and paving the way for rising oceans to redraw America's coastlines?

The president's Clean Power Plan, which is the focus of public hearings in four cities around the country this month, has generated tremendous hype and confusion. But the bottom line is simple: These rules just don't do enough to cut planet-warming pollution from existing power plants.

A careful review shows that the president's plan aims to reduce existing power plant emissions about 7.7 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. But scientists warned years ago that developed countries like the United States must reduce emissions far more — 25 percent to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020 — to avoid tipping the scales further toward a climate catastrophe.

The president's plan is more than three-quarters too little and 10 years too late.

As noted in a recent analysis by Ecofys, a group of prominent climate scientists, the Clean Power Plan's reductions are "far from those needed" to avert dangerous warming.

If the world continues on its current high-carbon pathway, we could suffer as much as 4 feet of sea-level rise and 10 degrees Fahrenheit of warming by century's end.

Global warming is also increasing extreme weather risk, harming biodiversity, and will even threaten our food supply, the National Climate Assessment warned.

Unfortunately, Obama's plan for existing power plants isn't the only problem. The Environmental Protection Agency's recent proposal to regulate carbon pollution from new power plants does even less to reduce emissions.

In fact, the EPA admits that the new power plant rule will not reduce emissions at all, because plants built over the next decade or more would likely meet the standards, even if the proposed rule weren't in place.

That's because natural gas from the fracking boom is so cheap that new coal plants largely aren't being built. And the EPA's standard

doesn't require new natural gas plants to be any more efficient than all but the very worst existing plants.

We can't frack our way out of climate change. Recent studies show that natural gas production leaks so much methane — a dangerously potent greenhouse gas — that this supposedly cleaner energy source is actually about as bad for the climate as coal. Yet the gist of both recent power plant rules seems to be that natural gas gets a free pass to pollute.

As data from the National Climate Assessment makes clear, carbon pollution has to peak quickly to avert truly catastrophic climate change. That means we must hold both new and existing power plants to the highest possible standards, not just let utilities and states keep on doing what they would have done anyway.

And stronger rules would actually aid our economy. Study after study has found that a shift to a clean-energy economy would create new jobs and that the estimated costs of compliance with new environmental protections are routinely overstated.

As global warming increases flooding and storm surge threats to communities along our coasts, Obama's draft power plant plan should be strengthened to achieve the global pollution cuts scientists recommend.

Sea-level rise has been cocking its fist for a good while now. At this point, only swift action can help us avoid this ponderous but devastating punch.

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