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EPA rules hit SC hardest

51-percent carbon dioxide reduction could cause rate increase

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By **Lucas Vance** - lvance@civitasmedia.com



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WINNSBORO — Energy customers could be facing rate increases if the Environmental Protection Agency's "Clean Power Plan" for South Carolina is passed.

The plan is requiring South Carolina to make the largest carbon dioxide rate reduction in the nation — 51 percent — by 2030.

Reaching that goal will be expensive and without modifications, the rule could raise electricity rates creating negative economic implications for South Carolina's economy and consumers.

According to Mark Quinn, director of Public and Member Relations at Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, the rule disproportionately affects South Carolina, one of the poorest states in America.

Quinn is bringing attention to the new rule and recently spoke at a Winnsboro Rotary Club meeting. He has

spent the last six months visiting towns in South Carolina to discuss the rule and gather petition signatures to change the rule.

Nuclear energy is expensive to build Quinn noted, “but once it’s up and running is efficient and produces zero carbon emissions.”

V.C. Summer Units 2 & 3 are scheduled to come online in 2019-2020. However, the EPA’s rule assumes that the yet to be completed units are already completed and operating, Quinn stated. The EPA is not giving South Carolina credit for when the power plants come online and the reductions that will make.

“They are not counting that,” Quinn emphasized. “It’s astonishing and if a solar farm or wind farm was being built, then those would be given credit. We’re being basically unfairly penalized. If they don’t give use credit for that it will be nearly impossible to reach that goal.”

Quinn noted that if South Carolina was given credit for V.C. Summer Units 2 & 3, that would reduce the 51-percent reduction requirement in half.

Many other states are not facing the challenges that South Carolina is facing and could receive the benefit of incoming industry due to lower power rates.

Coal industry accounts for 45 to 50-percent of energy in South Carolina. Santee Cooper and other power providers have already shutdown some of their coal plants.

In the 1970’s the EPA outlawed natural gas plants, which spurred the construction of many coal plants.

“Now these many years later the rules are changing again,” Quinn said.

Natural Gas

Natural gas burns cleaner than coal and the EPA wants to replace coal burning plants with natural gas plants. Quinn explained that is a good option for other states, but not South Carolina.

South Carolina only has three natural gas pipelines. One flows from Greenville to Charlotte, N.C., and two smaller pipelines that flow in Jasper and Aiken Counties.

“The fact of the matter is that we don’t have the infrastructure to get natural gas to the lower part of the state,” Quinn noted. “Again the EPA is assuming we can use something that is just not possible.”

According to Electric Cooperatives in South Carolina, the state does not have the pipeline capacity to support construction of new natural gas plants.

Renewable Resources

The development of solar and wind farms have been encouraged by the EPA and the largest solar farm in the state came online last year. It is located in Colleton County and is the largest project of its kind in the state.

However, Quinn noted there are some limitations when it comes to renewable resources.

“If the sun doesn’t shine or the wind doesn’t blow, there’s not going to be any power,” he stated.

According to the EPA, carbon-dioxide emissions can be reduced by 10-percent by using energy efficient

appliances. Despite those number reported by the EPA, Quinn noted a study that said if South Carolina retro-fitted 200,000 homes there would only be a 5-percent reduction.

“Our study is the most comprehensive of its kind at this point,” he advised.

The EPA used North Carolina renewable energy policy data to make projections and targets for renewable resources in South Carolina. The agency did not undertake a separate analysis for South Carolina’s resources and constraints.

What can we do?

Potential affects if the rule stands include many negative economic impact on energy consumers.

Quinn said that the EPA has to get rid of the nuclear penalty and South Carolina needs to receive credit for V. C. Summer Units 2 & 3 to avoid penalties in 2030.

“We have to get credit for being proactive and investing in those units because we’ve already spent billions of dollars,” he advised. “We also have to correct those assumptions about natural gas and renewable resources in South Carolina.”

Quinn said his organization is working with power providers and environmentalists to come up with a bill that passed both sides of the State House and State Senate unanimously.

“That never happens, but there was not a single person that voted against it,” he noted. “We’re working hand in hand with all of our stakeholders to make sure we can get these rules changed.”

His efforts have gained 150,000 signatures so far.

“This is about getting as many people’s voices as possible to be heard at Washington,” Quinn said. “The more comments we get, the more they will have to listen.”

Quinn was scheduled to speak at Fairfield County Council’s meeting on Sept. 22, but had to reschedule. Chairman David Ferguson said he hopes Quinn will be on the agenda to present at the next meeting on Oct. 13.

The public comment period for this rule ends Oct. 16. Concerned citizens can send their comments directly to the EPA at www.sc.tellepa.com.

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