U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up

Prepared by the Office of Public Affairs

Friday, February 15, 2013

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on April 1, 2010:

NOTE: To read the entire blog entry, click on underlined URL. To learn more about the blogger, click on the name/link in first line. Notes and headings are from OPA.

Lisa Jackson

Call on EPA to reduce coal ash health risks for everyone @LisaPJackson
Posted by: @ ssctrain 6:40 pm Full post: http://www.bit.ly/aWHXFE

Destroying America with the EPA's Carbon Lies by Alan Caruba: Lisa Jackson, Obama's EPA director….
Posted by: climaterealists: 4:40 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/aK1Klk

Good moves, not enough RT @lisapjackson more guidance on mountaintop mining standards to protect Appalachian waters:
Posted by: AdamJermstad: 3:40 pm Full post: http://budurl.com/wxg2

Thank you! RT @lisapjackson: Today announced more guidance on MTM standards to protect App waters:
Posted by: jwrandolph 2:35 pm Full post: http://budurl.com/wxg2

Music to my ears! RT @jwrandolph: Roughly quoting @LisaPJackson: None-to-very few valleyfills wd b able 2 meet this guidance
Posted by: kycarrie: 2:45 pm Full post: http://budurl.com/wxg2

Mountain Top Removal Mining Announcement

Guardian (UK): EPA Raises the Bar for Mountaintop Mining: The Obama administration effectivel...
Posted by: solveclimate 7:10 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/briHkg

NY Times: EPA Rules to Limit Water Pollution From Mining
Posted by: Berry_Smith: 7:07 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/aUbTfP
(Note: "Let me be clear," Ms. Jackson said during a phone call with reporters. "This is not about ending coal mining. This is about ending coal mining pollution.")

Wash. Independent: EPA Sharply Limits Mountaintop Mining: By curbing the practice of dumping waste in valleys, the...
Posted by: TMCMemberFeed: 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/cPhdD5

Earth Justice News: EPA Issues Guidelines to Prevent Further Environmental Harm to Appalachia
Posted by: Earthjustice: 6:50 pm Full post: http://goo.gl/fb/1RSdw
(Note: From Earthjustice president Trip Van Noppen: "We commend Administrator Jackson and the EPA for recognizing that the people of coal communities deserve the full protection of our clean water laws, and we're glad to see that EPA is back on the job.

EPA and DOT Enact New Auto Fuel Efficiency Standards

Yet more reason to flee VA RT @postmetro: Ken #Cuccinelli to challenge Obama/EPA over fuel standards for cars, trucks
Posted by: mjanssen 6:20 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/99Pu2R

NY Times: A very good move today by EPA! U.S. Issues Limits on Greenhouse Gas Emissions From Cars
Posted by: fjwakron 6:00 pm Full post: - http://nyti.ms/c4fGjn

US DOT/EPA & Canada set higher mpg standards & 1st ever GHG levels for pass. cars & lt. trucks.
Posted by: USClimateLaw: 4:28 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/9yNYXl

EPA & DOT Finalize New Vehicle Standards to Save Oil, Cut Pollution, And Create Jobs
Posted by: FloorMatGuys 4:30 pm Full post: - http://bit.ly/a48c77

EPA estimates new auto regs boost price of cars & trucks by average US $1,300 per vehicle.
Posted by: FraserInstitute: 3:35 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/drDhaA

EPA historic #tailpipe rule cuts GH gases from cars, trucks, & reduce smog and soot in southern cities
Posted by: selc_org: 2:05 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/d1ZEqR
(Note: Southern Environmental Law Center)

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

ENERGY

EPA Announces New Water Quality Standards For Mountaintop Removal Permits (*Tree Hugger*)

by Rachel Cernansky on 04. 1.10

Lisa Jackson announced a new EPA guidance document today that will create new standards for mountaintop removal project permits. Some of us were hoping (if unrealistically) for an all-out ban, but the move should at least reduce the damage to water quality that mountaintop removal is known for.

The major highlight of the new guidance is the EPA's concern over the electrical conductivity found in streams near mining sites. (Conductivity is the measure of water's ability to conduct an electric current, and in the context of mountaintop removal, it is a good indicator of damage to a stream because it reveals dissolved solids in the water that can kill aquatic life.)

In trying to understand the environmental impact of mountaintop removal, some studies looking at conductivity have relied on a benchmark of 500 microsiemens per cubic centimeter, a level above which streams can suffer irreversible damage—but today's announcement points to a new study warning that even levels of 300 microsiemens can be harmful. (Scary, then, that Jackson mentioned this morning having seen levels as high as 4,000 or 5,000.)

For non-scientists, what this means is that permits for mountaintop removal projects will be held to higher environmental standards. So in theory, if a mining proposal has no plan for keeping water damage to below 500 microsiemens per cubic centimeter, it will not be granted a permit. The case of Spruce Mine gives reason to believe this will be upheld.

As for the 300 level, as Coal Tattoo explains, "if modeling suggests conductivity will end up between 300 and 500, then EPA 'should work with the permitting authority to ensure that the permit includes conditions that protect against conductivity levels exceeding 500.'"

In a conference call with the press today, Lisa Jackson made it clear that "this is not about ending coal mining—this is about ending coal mining pollution."

EPA issues 'sweeping' mountaintop mining rules (*The Hill*)

By Jim Snyder - 04/01/10 02:23 PM ET

EPA announced today new permit requirements for mountaintop mining operations designed to reduce water pollution levels. An industry official called the changes "sweeping" in scope and a threat to jobs in Appalachia.

The guidance from EPA establishes a range of conductivity levels for streams affected by runoff from mountaintop mining, a controversial practice in which explosives literally blow off the tops

of mountains to expose coal seams near the surface. Conductivity is a measure of the salt in the water. The higher the salt levels the more difficult it is for organisms to survive.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said the intention wasn't to stop coal mining but to stop water pollution from coal mining and to provide the industry with greater clarity on water standards mines have to meet.

"The people of Appalachia shouldn't have to choose between a clean, healthy environment in which to raise their families and the jobs they need to support them," Jackson said in a statement.

Luke Popovich, a spokesman for the National Mining Association, said the group was "deeply concerned" that EPA's action would harm the regional economy.

"This guidance ignores a much-needed balance between economic needs and environmental expectations," Popovich said.

EPA's guidance establishes a range of conductivity levels mine applications will be measured against. The standard sets a maximum level of 500 microSiemens per centimeter, which is about five times the normal level, EPA said. The goal is to protect 95 percent of aquatic life in fresh water streams in Appalachia, where this type of mining is performed.

One target of the new guidance is the "valley fills" mountaintop mining operations can create. Mine operators sometimes dump the mountain debris in nearby valleys, a practice that environmental groups say causes severe damage to the environment.

Jackson said the guidance would likely severly curtail valley fills, if not eliminate them altogether. NMA's Popovich said the guidance would apply to other types of mining operations and could also put new restrictions on construction and other commercial activities.

The new guidance doesn't affect mines now operating but will be applied to 79 permits under review at EPA and future mine applications, Jackson said.

EPA also released two studies on the effects of mountaintop mining. The studies show "significant damage to local streams that are polluted with the mining runoff from mountaintop mining removal," EPA said in a release.

Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, said the policy "represents the most significant administrative action ever taken to address mountaintop removal coal mining."

This story was updated at 4:25 on Thursday.

EPA Proposes New Mountaintop Removal Pollution Controls (*Huffington Post*)

TIM HUBER | 04/ 1/10 04:26 PM |

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The Obama administration Thursday spelled out tighter water quality standards for surface coal mines in Appalachia in a move that could curtail mountaintop removal mining.

The policy will sharply reduce the practice of filling valleys with waste from mountaintop removal and other types of surface mines in a six-state region, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said.

The policy met with immediate praise from opponents who consider mountaintop mining too destructive and disappointment from mine operators who say the new approach will eliminate many valuable jobs.

The agency also released two reports discussing watershed damage in the region from surface mining. Burying streams with mine wastes increases salt levels in waterways downstream, hurting fish and other aquatic life, the EPA said. Jackson said the new policy should protect 95 percent of aquatic life.

"You're talking about either no or very few valley fills," Jackson said. "That's just the truth, that's the science of it."

The lone major permit approved by federal regulators since Jackson began cracking down on Appalachian surface mining a year ago includes no valley fills.

"These new guidelines will reduce the destruction caused by mountaintop removal, and communities will be able to focus on building a clean energy economy," Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune said in a statement.

Virginia-based Massey Energy, one of the largest producers in the affected region, provided a chart showing San Pellegrino and Perrier mineral waters exceed the EPA standard, as did water from a pond at a southern West Virginia mine.

"We're deeply concerned by the impact this policy will have on employment and economic activity throughout the Appalachian region," National Mining Association spokesman Luke Popovich said.

Story continues below

The organization's figures show surface mines in the six states covered by the policy produced more than 150 million tons of coal and employed nearly 20,500 people in 2008. U.S. production totaled more than 1.17 billion that year.

"To painstakingly try to limit the impacts to one kind of mining operation, to a single industry and to future operations is frankly disingenuous," Popovich said.

The EPA is applying the policy in West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and Tennessee. "All the science here and all the data, much of it comes from the state of West Virginia," Jackson said.

She said it may be applied to underground mining as well, though that practice typically is more palatable to environmental groups. "Please don't think we won't look at and use this same science in evaluating other types of operations," she said.

West Virginia's Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Randy Huffman questioned EPA's approach, saying the agency was changing the permitting process through a guidance document rather than regulations. "They put the standards they want on the mining industry without going through any legal framework," he said.

Moreover, Huffman said EPA's new standard is lower than what his agency had determined was protective of water quality and aquatic life.

"The geology and other characteristics of a stream impact are what causes adverse impacts or doesn't," he said. "There is not a one-size fits all for dissolved solids. That's one of the concerns of the approach EPA is taking here."

Associated Press Writer Brian Farkas contributed to this story.

FUEL

LaHood: New auto mileage rules were a hard slog(*The Hill)*

By Ben Geman - 04/01/10 01:28 PM ET

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Thursday that finalizing new auto efficiency rules took *lots* of work for his department.

The Transportation Department and EPA rolled out final rules Thursday – covering model years 2012-2016 – that sharply increase fuel economy standards and impose first-time carbon dioxide limits on vehicles.

Asked on a conference call if DoT and EPA would continue collaborating on rules for subsequent years, he joked: “Anything post-2016 will come after people get a good week of sleep.”

Source:
http://thehill.com/blogs/e2-wire/677-e2-wire/90233-lahood-new-auto-mileage-rules-were-a-hard-slog

Green groups, automakers praise new vehicle mileage rules (*The Hill*)

By Ben Geman - 04/01/10 02:36 PM ET

A day after environmentalists roundly criticized the Obama administration for expanding offshore drilling, green groups are cheering newly-finalized rules that boost vehicle fuel economy and limit tailpipe greenhouse gas emissions.

The Transportation Department and EPA completed joint rules Thursday – covering model years 2012-2016 – that they estimate will conserve nearly 1.8 billion barrels of oil and cut emissions by nearly a billion tons over the lives of the vehicles.

"This action represents an essential step toward meeting the president's goals of transforming our nation's energy policies, rebuilding the struggling economy and protecting the planet for future generations," said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters, one of several environmental groups that cheered the new rules.

The rules have buy-in from the auto industry. They represent a deal struck last year between the industry, the White House, and states under which California and roughly a dozen other states planning to impose vehicle emissions standards agreed to defer to the federal rule.

That meant the auto industry avoided a patchwork of state rules, and in return accepted a faster ramp-up in mileage standards than called for under a 2007 law.

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers – a trade group representing 11 automakers including Detroit's big three – praised the rules.

"America needs a roadmap to reduced dependence on foreign oil and greenhouse gases, and only the federal government can play this role," said Alliance CEO Dave McCurdy. "Today, the federal government has laid out a course of action through 2016, and now we need to work on 2017 and beyond."

According to EPA and DoT, the rules will add an average of $950 to the cost of a model year 2016 car, but consumers will see a net savings of $3,000 over the life of the vehicle thanks to the improved mileage.

Not everyone is thrilled with the rules, however. The first-time regulation of vehicle carbon dioxide sets the stage for planned EPA rules covering greenhouse gases from factories, power plants and other large stationary sources.

“The rule is not just about vehicle efficiency. It’s about EPA overreaching to create an opportunity for regulating greenhouse gas emissions from virtually every firm and business in America, no matter how unwieldy, intrusive and burdensome such regulation might be,” the American Petroleum Institute said in a statement Thursday.

EPA has vowed not to begin regulating stationary sources until next year, and plans to phase-in the requirements slowly. The Obama administration says it wants Congress to pass a new climate law, but that EPA will move ahead with rules under its current Clean Air Act powers if lawmakers do not act.

April Fuel

Everything you need to know about Obama’s new fuel-economy rules (*Grist*)

by Jonathan Hiskes
1 Apr 2010 11:07 AM
Big Auto, Business, cars, Climate & Energy, Department of Transportation, EPA, fuel, greenhouse-gas emissions, news, Obama administration, Politics, transportation more»
The federal government rolled out new auto fuel-efficiency standards today, capping more than a year of planning and, as the New York Times notes, a 30-year battle between regulators and automakers.

The new standards are a big deal—they’ll do more to cut the pollution of heat-trapping gasses than anything the Obama administration has done so far. But if it seems like you’ve heard about them before, you probably have—the regs got lots of press when they were first proposed last May. Thursday’s action puts that plan into effect, for 2012-2016 vehicles.

So I'm reposting **our cheat sheet from last May**, The scoop on Obama's new fuel-economy rules. Here it is:

On May 19, President Barack Obama unveiled new standards to regulate fuel economy and greenhouse-gas emissions from cars and light trucks.

The bottom line: New automobiles will have to get better gas mileage

The numbers:

- Current standards: 27.5 miles per gallon for cars and 24 mpg for light trucks
- Starting in 2012, fuel efficiency will rise more than 5 percent each year
- New standards for 2016: 39 mpg for cars and 30 mpg for light trucks -- an overall average of about 35.5 mpg

The environmental benefits:

- Will save 1.8 billion barrels of oil over the life of the program
- Will prevent 900 million metric tons of greenhouse-gas emissions
- Will be like taking 177 million of today's cars off the road, or shutting down 194 coal-fired power plants

Fans of the plan:

- The major automakers, because they now have certainty and one clear set of regulations to follow
- The major environmental groups, because the federal government is actually doing something to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions
- California and 13 other states, because they have long wanted tougher auto emissions standards

Obama sings the plan's praises:

In the past, an agreement such as this would have been considered impossible. That is why this announcement is so important, for it represents not only a change in policy in Washington, but the harbinger of a change in the way business is done in Washington. ... And at a time of historic crisis in our auto industry, this rule provides the clear certainty that will allow these companies to plan for a future in which they are building the cars of the 21st century.

Find out more:

- Kate Sheppard reports that the new rules are the administration's first real step to curb greenhouse-gas emissions.
- The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers says it's happy with the new rules.
- Michael Moynihan argues that fuel-economy rules are among the least precise tools for addressing climate change.

For some related big-picture pondering…

I'm glad to tell you why the bakery of transportation choices includes tastier options than stale auto dependency.

And Grist's David Roberts considers what a post-auto American city might look like.

Cuccinelli challenges fuel standards (*Washington Post*)

Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli will challenge new standards for fuel efficiency for cars and trucks finalized Thursday by the Obama administration and Enivironmental Protection Agency.

Cuccinelli has already filed suit against the EPA based upon the agency's determination that it can regulate greenhouse gases because they cause global warming harmful to human health. In a statement, Cuccinelli's spokesman said he believes Thursday's announcement by the Obama administration amounts to a "tacit denial" of his request that the EPA reconsider its determination.

"In that motion, the attorney general's office asked the EPA to reopen its proceedings in light of the recent evidence that the reports the EPA was relying on for its decision contained erroneous and/or unverifiable global temperature and other data," said spokesman Brian Gottstein in a statement. "We will file a notice of appeal with respect to today's ruling."

The appeal would raise the issue to the D.C. Court of Appeals.

Gottstein also said the fuel standards will prompt a new filing from the AG's office in its case against the EPA and a presentation of new evidence in the case. The new motion has not yet been filed, he said.

-- Rosalind Helderman

By Monica Norton | April 1, 2010; 5:35 PM ET