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OEC hails EPA finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health

Environmental group calls for Congressional action instead of EPA rulemaking to catalyze comprehensive climate change solution

Columbus, OH – The Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is applauding the United States EPA’s historic decision announced today that greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as carbon dioxide are air pollutants that “cause or contribute” to climate change.

This marks the first official federal recognition that human activity contributes to climate change and sets the stage for national regulation of GHGs. The EPA finding also states that climate change is a danger to public health. EPA’s endangerment finding means the agency will be required to regulate GHG emissions under Section 202 of the federal Clean Air Act.

While the EPA finding could be a catalyst to sweeping change, it is not a solution unto itself.

“The long-term and pervasive impacts of climate change demand long-term and comprehensive solutions. The way to regulate GHG emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change is through federal cap and trade legislation,” said Will Reisinger, OEC Staff Attorney. “In the last century, Congressional legislation has provided an effective cap and trade program to reduce sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides emissions that cause acid rain and ozone smog. We should control greenhouse gases with a similar market-based system.”

A federal cap and trade system would place a definite limit—a “cap”—on the amount of GHGs which could be emitted by sources within the United States each year. Emissions credits would then be allocated to regulated GHG emitters, such as power plants and other industrial sources. Regulated facilities would have to pay for any emissions that exceed their allocated emissions credits.

A cap and trade approach would create a market for tradable emissions credits, allowing emitters to buy and sell those credits. Such a system would provide a financial incentive for continuous innovation and GHG reductions. Facility owners would have an incentive to update technology and continuously reduce emissions to avoid having to pay a charge; they could even sell unused credits for a profit. The technology produced in America can then be exported to fight climate change around the globe.

“While regulating greenhouse gases through EPA rulemaking is one route, we are confident that a federal cap and trade bill is the most efficient way to tackle climate change immediately and over the long term,” said Reisinger. “We need swift action that protects our planet while simultaneously providing incentives for innovation by industry.”

EPA’s announcement means that the agency will move forward with rulemaking unless there is federal legislation that implements a comprehensive cap and trade on GHGs. The prospect of imminent regulation provides an opportunity for Ohio’s leaders to take action.

“We urge Governor Strickland and Senators Brown and Voinovich to use their influence to compel Congress to pass a climate bill this year,” said Reisinger. “EPA has told the nation that regulation is coming; the only question is in what form. Ohio citizens and business would be best served by a flexible trading scheme that rewards innovation.”

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio’s leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio’s families and communities. For more information, visit www.theOEC.org.