Talking Points on the EPA’s Power Plant Rule

BACKGROUND: Currently, there are no limits on the amount of carbon pollution spewed into the air by power plants. Excessive greenhouse gases are the key cause of climate disruption. The electricity sector is the biggest source of US greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 60% of stationary source GHG emissions in 2011.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s carbon pollution protections (aka the EPA’s Power Plant Rules) for new and existing power plants would limit the amount of carbon pollution that power plants can dump into our air. These safeguards would require energy companies to reduce their carbon emissions using technological innovation and a transition to “cleaner” sources of energy based on state implementation plans.

This document is a tool for those who are speaking about how the EPA’s new rules and its connection to what will increase Fracking.

We support the EPA's proposal to substantially reduce carbon pollution by 2030. However, the 30 percent by 2030 target is woefully inadequate. Climate scientists agree that a much greater reduction in TOTAL greenhouse gas emissions, upwards of 40 percent by 2020, is needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

A substantive step forward in reducing carbon emissions is essential. This proposal could reduce emissions and allow states to consider renewables and energy efficiency. States could also pledge to retire coal and gas plants in favor of bringing renewable energy online. However, these rules, as written only codify the transition from coal to gas that was already underway. Contrary to how it has been advertised, the EPA’s own Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) predicts that the rule would have almost no effect on the amount of power generation from renewable energy in the U.S. by 2030. In fact the RIA predicts that the rule would create an immediate surge in new gas-fired power plants, resulting by 2020 in an increase in
The proposed EPA power plant rule must be substantially amended to meaningfully combat climate change and not make matters worse. The standard must be made stronger by getting states to fully commit to clean energy futures and ramp up wind, solar and efficiency commitments. This would be faster, cleaner and more economical than investing in natural gas and/or nuclear power. Renewables and efficiency can produce more reductions of CO2 (per megawatt hour) than natural gas.

Like a diet that limits calories per cookie, but not the number of cookies, setting greenhouse gas reduction goals based on emissions per unit of energy (lbs of CO2/MWh) cannot succeed. The rule should set absolute reduction targets for total greenhouse gas emissions for each state. Otherwise emissions will continue to grow as more energy is consumed.

States should not be allowed to reduce average CO2 emissions from power plants power generation from gas compared to without the rule that is eight to ten times greater than the meager boost given to renewables. This actually creates a disincentive for utilities to invest in renewable energy. Instead of promoting fossil fuels that continue to pump greenhouse gases into the air, the rule should be redesigned with policies that expressly favor renewable wind, water, and solar energy, which are emission free.

Total greenhouse gas emissions should be calculated using most current data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), recognizing that methane is 86 times more potent than CO2 over a twenty-year timeframe.

A growing body of research indicates that leakage from natural gas systems far exceeds EPA estimates. As demonstrated by Drs. Howarth and Ingraffea of Cornell University, and repeated by numerous other studies, when total lifecycle impacts and accurate emission rates are considered, natural gas produced from fracking has no to little advantage over coal in fighting climate change.

There needs to be a connection between carbon emission reductions and
by “averaging”, which would allow states to reduce CO2 by increasing natural gas and reducing coal. We do not want fracked gas as the base standard with efficiency and renewable energy as alternatives. We want a clean power plan that reduces fossil fuels across the board in favor of truly clean renewable energy, conservation and efficiency.

Scientists have warned that irreversible climate catastrophe cannot be avoided without a dramatic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the next couple of decades. We cannot afford baby steps and counterproductive measures. Instead of promoting a strategy that perpetuates fossil fuels and fracking, the proposed rule should be replaced with one that aggressively pursues renewables, energy efficiency, and conservation.

Using the Clean Air Act, the president aims to reduce existing power plant emissions 30 percent below 2005 levels (or about 7.7 percent below 1990 levels, the base year for the international climate treaty) by 2030. But international scientists warned years ago that developed countries like the United States must reduce their emissions 25 percent to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020 to avoid tipping the scales further toward a climate catastrophe.

The rule must address total lifecycle emissions and all greenhouse gases, not just CO2. For gas-fired power plants, this includes methane leakage during production, processing, and transmission, emissions from flaring at gas wells, and energy consumed in the production and transport of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Environmental impacts. The EPA’s current staggered approach towards reaching its target emissions rate for 2030 should be ranked by full environmental impacts as well air and water -quality impacts.

The Obama administration has said the power plant rules will help meet the emission reduction pledge the president made at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference five years ago, but scientists agree the Copenhagen pledges are not enough to head off a climate crisis.