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International concern as US moves to end clean power plan

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The Trump administration plans to repeal and replace landmark policy that underpinned US commitment to Paris Agreement and a key climate deal with China



US and Chinese presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping found common ground on climate change after the US announced the clean power plan (Pic: White House/Flickr)

By **Karl Mathiesen**

News that the Trump administration will move to repeal and replace the clean power plan (CPP) – a major initiative to cut emissions from the US electricity sector – has been met with concern overseas.

On Wednesday, the [Reuters news agency](#) reported on a document leaked from the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) outlining a plan to scrap the Obama-era measure.

It also called for input on a replacement policy that would reduce carbon emissions in fossil fuel power plants. Industry is [reportedly](#) lobbying for a weaker rule.

The policy underpinned the US commitment to the Paris Agreement, which Donald Trump says he wants to leave. It would also have had a real impact on the amount of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere. By 2030, the clean power plan would have reduced power plant emissions in the world's second biggest polluter by **32% below 2005 levels**.

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Maldives environment and energy minister Thoriq Ibrahim, who chairs an alliance of small island states (Aosis), pointed to storms that battered the Caribbean last month as a reason to toughen up, not scrap, carbon laws.

“After an onslaught of deadly hurricanes, it should be obvious to all of us, especially those with the greatest historic responsibility to act, that we need to redouble efforts to cut emissions,” said Ibrahim. “In fact, Aosis ministers are meeting in Maldives next week to further develop our own renewable energy plans. If we can do it, everyone can.”

The CPP was the key US commitment that convinced the Chinese to [enjoin a bipartisan agreement](#) with the US on cutting emissions. That deal, between the world's number one and two polluters, provided a platform on which the Paris climate deal was struck a year later.

Rescinding the plan, said Li Shuo, climate policy advisor at Greenpeace East Asia, would be seen as a breach of the agreement in China. “This is indeed unfortunate.”

He said China had a “special stake” in keeping the US on course to meet its commitments to the Paris climate agreement because the US target was signed off by presidents of both countries.

“What will China do in response to a US that's diverting from its pledge?” Li said that so far, president Xi Jinping had remained mostly silent on Trump's stepping away from their agreement on climate change. But he has hinted at his displeasure, notably giving a [lavish welcome](#) to California's pro-climate governor Jerry Brown.

“At the same time [US energy secretary] Rick Perry received a much lower level reception, [which] was unconventional and quite bold by Chinese diplomatic standards,” said Li.

The EPA move is a response to an [executive order issued](#) by Donald Trump in March that called on the agency to scrap the scheme.

Richard Black, director of the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit in London, said the process in the US would likely be opposed in the courts by environment groups and some states.

“It won't be an easy ride,” he said. “Unless the administration finds a way to overturn the 2009 Endangerment Finding, which ruled that greenhouse gases must be regulated as emissions pose a threat to human health and wellbeing, those legal challenges are likely to win.”

News of the imminent demise of the CPP comes amid reports the Trump administration plans to [offer subsidies](#) to coal and nuclear generators. Meanwhile on Wednesday, [the International Energy Agency announced](#) that solar was, for the first time ever, the world's fastest growing source of new power.

Black said: “The transition of the US power sector from coal to gas and renewables continues, for purely economic reasons. By the time this goes through the courts, it's likely to be game over for coal anyway.”

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