

Senators Kerry and Lieberman Unveil New Climate Change and Energy Bill

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On May 12th, Senators John Kerry and Joe Lieberman introduced their climate change and energy bill, entitled "[The American Power Act.](#)" The bill's goal is to reduce carbon pollution by 17% by 2020 and by over 80% in 2050, and the bill attempts to achieve this goal through cap-and-trade and support for domestic energy. That's right, not just alternative energy, but also other forms of domestic energy, including coal, natural gas, and nuclear. The bill calls for major investments in research and development, as well as new infrastructure.

For example, the bill calls for the Nuclear Regulatory Agency to make recommendations for procedures that would expedite the licensing process for new nuclear reactors. The bill calls for funding of programs for the development and deployment of carbon capture, sequestration, and conversion technologies. The bill also calls for a national transportation low-emission energy plan that projects the near- and long-term need for and location of electric drive refueling infrastructure and identifies infrastructure and standardization needs of electricity providers, vehicle manufacturers, and electricity purchasers.

The bill would also provide a national cap-and-trade program for the reduction of greenhouse gases (existing programs run by the states would be preempted). Essentially, the bill would establish an annual tonnage limit (25,000 tons) on greenhouse gas emissions from specified activities. If covered entities cannot meet that limit, they would be able to purchase emission credits (at an auction) or get offset credits (for specified eligible activities).

Although a climate change bill has been on President Obama's agenda for some time, Congress has never really come close to passing one (because of lack of support by some on both sides of the aisle). But many hoped that this bill had a good chance to pass, because it had bipartisan support--Republican Senator Lindsey Graham had been one of the original co-sponsors. But Senator Graham dropped his support recently over a spat concerning immigration reform. We'll keep a close eye on where this bill goes.

Stay tuned to the Illinois Environmental Law Blog for more news and developments.