

Air Quality Control Commission Votes to Strengthen Air & Climate Protections

State Commission Takes Important Step Toward Colorado's Climate Goals

Denver, Colorado – May 22, 2020 – The Colorado Air Quality Control Commission a few minutes ago voted unanimously to adopt the new "Regulation 22" proposal. This is an important early step in achieving Colorado's greenhouse gas emission goals.

Colorado Communities for Climate Action (CC4CA) and the Local Government Coalition (LGC), together representing 37 local Colorado governments, have been actively supporting the proposal and have been a formal party to the rulemaking proceeding. This partnership includes both Front Range and Western Slope jurisdictions, which make up half of the communities represented.

The rulemaking is a direct result of legislation adopted last year by the Colorado General Assembly establishing statewide greenhouse gas emissions goals, directing the AQCC and other entities to update their regulations in order to meet these goals, and to dramatically improve how the state measures and tracks these emissions.

This decision means:

- Colorado will phase out the use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), an extremely potent greenhouse gas typically used in air conditioning and refrigeration systems. HFCs have up to ten thousand times more heat-trapping power than carbon dioxide, making them an extremely forceful greenhouse gas. There are good commercially available alternatives with a much lower climate impact.
- Colorado will dramatically improve how it tracks carbon pollution. Tracking will occur more often, and it will be much more accurate, including many pollution sources that have been ignored in the past and reflecting the progress Colorado is making.

- There are many sources of carbon pollution that individually don't contribute much, such as industrial landfills and underground coal mines, but when added up together make a substantial contribution. This new method will capture those.
- The new approach would track imported and exported electricity – electricity generated in Colorado that is used out-of-state and vice versa.
- The state recognizes the value of granular data that local governments can use for their own local policymaking and will refine the ability to provide these data.
- The rule makes it possible to account for all greenhouse gases, including methane, and acknowledges the varying potency of these greenhouse gases. Data collected by the state will show amounts of carbon dioxide (which is long-lived in the environment and so has a greenhouse impact for a long time) and short-lived but much more powerful pollutants like methane (which breaks down much more quickly than carbon dioxide but is eighty-seven times more powerful a greenhouse gas over a twenty-year timeframe).

We can't efficiently reduce carbon pollution if we don't know which sources are responsible for how much pollution. These new rules will help us make sure we are focusing on the strategies that work to protect our health and our communities.

Here are a few excerpts from the testimony provided yesterday by local elected officials around Colorado:

Salida Mayor P.T. Wood:

"Our economy is driven by tourism. Most of that tourism is around three things: skiing, the river, and camping, all three of which are deeply affected by climate change driven by greenhouse gas emissions increasing.

Last summer we had the Decker Fire just outside of town which had a devastating economic impact to our community."

Eagle County Commissioner Matt Scherr

"I know you've heard from people who feel the Covid-19 pandemic is a reason to slow down on this work, but slowing down is exactly the wrong response.

The pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn are highlighting just how vulnerable our economy and energy systems are to disruption. Continuing to burn fossil fuels is increasing the likelihood of more and severe economic disruption. The fossil fuel boom-bust cycle is just one example of this problem.

Recovering from the pandemic and this downturn, and then sustaining an economic recovery in coming decades, will depend on transitioning to a low-carbon economy as quickly as possible. Using the pandemic as an excuse to slide backward in this transition will mean Colorado falls farther and farther behind."

Telluride Mayor Pro Tem Todd Brown

"Right now, we are seeing peak runoff a full month earlier than long-term historical trends. We had good snow this winter, an "average" snowpack, but it's gone. We are seeing warmer and warmer conditions. We've been put on the extreme drought list already this summer and we are looking forward in a bad way to an extremely troublesome fire season."

Gilpin County Commissioner Gail Watson

"This May is the first May that I recall in my forty plus years in Colorado where we have not had any snow here at 9000 feet in Gilpin County in the month of May. Climate change is real. We have to act right away. Our fire season is year-round."

Finally, here are a few additional quotes about Regulation 22 from Local Government Coalition and Colorado Communities for Climate Action members:

"With every passing day the enormous dangers of the climate crisis, much like the risks of pandemics like COVID-19, become more apparent," said Anita Seitz, Westminster's Mayor Pro Tem. "Local communities across Colorado applaud the AQCC for taking this work seriously and striving so hard to protect Colorado's future."

"Public health agencies all over Colorado are fighting a severe pandemic that targets the respiratory system," said Cindy Copeland, air and climate policy specialist for Boulder County Public Health. "By strengthening air quality standards, we can help protect Colorado against the impacts of climate change and pandemics like this one."

"Carbon emissions have no boundaries," noted Denver City Council President Jolon Clark. "Denver is taking a bold lead on climate action but we can't reach our science-based goals without cooperation from our regional partners. I'm very proud that local governments, on the Front Range and the Western Slope, large and small, have come together to tackle climate change. These new rules will help us make sure we are focusing on the strategies that work to protect our health and all of our communities."

"The decline of the fossil fuel industry is a regional challenge. If Colorado is to have any kind of future, we simply must reduce our carbon pollution levels," observed Eagle County Commissioner Matt Scherr. "But at the same time, we are committed to supporting communities through this transition."

Colorado Communities for Climate Action is a coalition of 34 towns, cities, and counties across Colorado advocating for strong statewide climate policy. More than half of CC4CA's members are rural West Slope communities.

The Local Government Coalition is composed of 10 local government agencies from across Colorado, including the City and County of Denver, Boulder County Public Health, the City of Aurora, and Tri-County Health Department.

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