

# Roth: The Costs of Carbon Pollution

With increasingly erratic weather, massive snowstorms, more than 40,000 flights canceled in January and hundreds of millions of dollars spent in response, preparation and loss of productivity, some could rightly argue that we Americans are already paying the price of carbon.

A growing movement among policymakers to address costs at the actual source of pollution is a step toward relieving America from the risk of climate-based catastrophes.

Power plants are the largest stationary source of carbon pollution in the United States, accounting for nearly a third of greenhouse gas emissions. Last year, President Barack Obama introduced his Climate Action Plan. One of its main goals is the reduction of carbon emissions, which are widely known to cause climate change and erratic, damaging weather.



The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently proposed a rule that would set pollution emission standards for new fossil fuel-fired electric power plants. It sets emission standards for natural gas combined-cycle units and coal-fired units. As they are currently designed, natural gas units don't need additional technology to meet the emission standard because they burn cleaner coal.

Coal-fired units, however, would all be required to use carbon

capture and storage, or CCS, technology to lower emissions. Only one coal-fired unit in the U.S. is currently using CCS. The EPA's proposed standard for coal-fired units is 1,100 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per megawatt-hour of electricity. A typical coal plant that doesn't use CCS technology releases at least 1,800 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per megawatt-hour.

The main debate centers on whether it's feasible to require that new coal units implement CCS. The EPA argues that the technology is market-ready and feasible. Another coal unit is being built with CCS technology. The coal industry argues that implementing these proposed emission standards would effectively ban the construction of new coal plants because CCS is unproven and expensive.

The coal industry has a point that CCS is unproven. We don't know much about the effectiveness or cost. That may be a big gamble for utility customers, as a coal unit typically has a 60-year life on your bills.

However, carbon pollution has many serious consequences. Setting a standard for power plants is an effective way to lower carbon emissions at the source. Carbon pollution leads to rising global temperatures and sea levels, disruptive weather patterns, damages to the world's agricultural production and changes in ecosystems. It creates serious threats to public health, like increasingly frequent and severe weather disasters, heavier smog, respiratory diseases and an increased range of ticks and mosquitoes, which can carry diseases.

A problem as daunting as carbon pollution will require bold, creative action. The costs associated with the EPA's proposed carbon emission standard are substantial. However, the costs of carbon pollution could be immeasurable.

There's no magic method for reducing carbon emissions, but the

EPA's proposed carbon emission standard is a step that should be taken to start preserving our environment and economy for future generations. We are already beginning to pay for pollution in storm cleanups, rising insurance rates, crop failures, food prices, economic productivity and health care costs.

Some may suggest that we shouldn't do anything to control our destinies, when emerging economies like China are reluctant to act. I ask them: When did America choose to follow, rather than lead?