

# CEEPc Monthly Updates – January 2013

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*Events, News and Announcements related to Climate, Energy, & Environment  
in the Washington Region*

## Events

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Please bookmark MWCOG's Regional Energy Events Calendar:

<https://ncrportal.mwcog.org/sites/surveys/climate/Lists/Calendar/calendar.aspx>

- ✓ **January 30-31:** [VCU Energy & Sustainability Conference](#); Greater Richmond Convention Center
- ✓ **January 31:** [Walking the Talk: Climate Science in Service to Resilient Federal Properties](#); National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW
- ✓ **Feb 27 – March 1:** [Climate Leadership Conference](#); Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel

## Climate, Energy, and Environment News

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[Inaugural Speech Gives Climate Goals Center Stage](#) (Jan. 21) President Obama made addressing climate change the most prominent policy vow of his second Inaugural Address, setting in motion what Democrats say will be a deliberately paced but aggressive campaign built around the use of his executive powers to sidestep Congressional opposition. The centerpiece will be action by the Environmental Protection Agency to clamp down further on emissions from coal-burning power plants under regulations still being drafted — and likely to draw legal challenges. The administration plans to supplement that step by adopting new energy efficiency standards for home appliances and buildings, a seemingly small advance that can have a substantial impact by reducing demand for electricity. Those standards would echo the sharp increase in fuel economy that the administration required from automakers in the first term.

[Detroit Sheds Pounds for Gas-Mileage Gains](#) (Jan. 14) Auto makers wrestling with ambitious mileage goals have touted hybrids and electrics as the wave of the future, but they have found a quicker path to improved fuel efficiency, reinventing the way traditional gas-powered cars are built. Pressed to produce cars and trucks that go farther on a gallon of gas, manufacturers gathering here this week for the Motor City's annual auto show are cutting weight by substituting more plastics, aluminum and magnesium, including materials once found only in high-end race cars.

[2012 was hottest year on record in contiguous U.S.](#) (Jan. 8) Temperatures in the contiguous United States last year were the hottest in more than a century of record-keeping, shattering the mark set in 1998 by a wide margin, the federal government announced Tuesday. The average temperature in 2012 was 55.3 degrees, one degree above the previous record and 3.2 degrees higher than the 20th-century average, scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said. They described the data as part of a longer-term trend of hotter, drier and potentially more extreme weather. The higher temperatures are due in part to cyclical weather patterns, according to the scientists. But the researchers also said the data provided further compelling evidence that human activity — especially

the burning of fossil fuels, which produces greenhouse gases — is contributing to changes in the U.S. climate.

[Congress Prevents Wind Industry from Falling Off Cliff](#) (Jan. 2) The deal to avert the so-called “fiscal cliff” that passed the Senate and the House, and is expected to be signed by the President, includes an important extension of federal tax credits for wind and other renewable energy projects that begin construction in 2013. This will temporarily help the wind industry from going off its own cliff.

[Solar Installations Surge on Lower Costs and Government Support](#) (Dec. 11) The number of solar installations grew strongly in the nation’s residential, commercial and utility sectors in the third quarter, largely as a result of falling costs, a federal investment tax credit and state programs that support renewable energies, the solar industry’s main trade group reported on Tuesday. The Solar Energy Industries Association said that 684 megawatts of solar photovoltaic capacity was installed in the quarter, 44 percent more than in the third quarter of 2011.

[Declining Air Pollution Levels Continue to Improve Life Expectancy in U.S.](#) (Dec. 3) A new study led by researchers at Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) has found an association between reductions in fine particulate matter and improved life expectancy in 545 counties in the U.S. from 2000 to 2007. It is the largest study to date to find beneficial effects to public health of continuing to reduce air pollution levels in the U.S. The study appears in the December 3, 2012 online edition of the journal *Epidemiology*.

## State Update

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### District of Columbia

[Vincent Gray picks new environment department boss](#) (Jan. 17) D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray announced Friday that he has tapped Keith Anderson, who has been the interim director of the District Department of the Environment, to lead the agency permanently.

[D.C. aims to create sustainable ‘living building’](#) (Dec. 13) Seeking to further distinguish the District as a national leader in urban sustainability, officials plan to create the city’s first “living building,” joining a green certification program that promotes the highest level of architectural sustainability. The Living Building Challenge focuses on seven aspects of a site — location, water and energy use, health, materials, social equity and beauty — to create a structure that is environmentally friendly and enjoyable to use.

### Maryland

[Solar farm in Charles County gives SMECO new energy](#) (Jan. 10) Six weeks after the region’s first commercially operated solar farm went live, the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative is so pleased with the results that it’s looking to build a second facility. The 5.5-megawatt farm, which is up the street from SMECO’s Hughesville headquarters, started producing electricity Nov. 18, with 10 percent of its output going to power the co-op’s new engineering and operations center, also located nearby. At maximum production, the facility will generate enough clean energy to power 600 homes and offset the pollution of 1,600 cars, SMECO officials say.

[Md. gas drilling panel's work delayed](#) (Dec. 17) The Maryland Department of the Environment said Monday that the Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission, the panel studying the impact of natural gas drilling in western Maryland, expects to put the draft report out for public comment sometime this spring instead of by Dec. 31. An MDE spokesman says the commission still aims to issue its final report on best practices by Aug. 1. The panel's conclusive report on the environmental impact of hydraulic fracturing is due a year later, on Aug. 1, 2014.

[Prince George's County to consider bag tax](#) (Dec. 9) Maryland's second-largest county is pushing for a tax on plastic grocery bags, joining a number of local governments across the U.S. that are considering taxing or banning the bags as a way to reduce litter and generate extra revenue. State lawmakers from Prince George's County plan to push a bill in the 2013 General Assembly that would allow a 5-cents-a-bag tax at groceries and other stores in the county, following similar laws in neighboring Montgomery County — the state's largest county with more than 970,000 residents — and the District.

## Virginia

[Rift Widens Over Mining of Uranium in Virginia](#) (Jan. 19) Bills introduced to the General Assembly last week would lift a moratorium on uranium mining in the state. Political supporters say that the mining would bring economic benefits and that risks from radioactive wastes, or tailings, can be safely managed. Opponents fear the contamination of drinking water in case of an accident, and a stigma from uranium that would deter people and businesses from moving to the area.

[Va. Lawmaker pushing plastic bag tax](#) (Dec. 12) Virginia lawmakers will decide next year whether to impose a nickel tax on plastic bags just like patrons pay in D.C. and Montgomery County in Maryland. Del. Joe Morrissey, D-Highland Springs, is proposing the tax to raise money for Virginia's Water Quality Improvement Fund, a key revenue stream for Chesapeake Bay cleanup. If passed, by July 2014, every plastic bag handed out at the register at grocery stores, convenience stores and drugstores would cost customers 5 cents.

## Federal Update

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[EPA tightens soot rules by 20 percent](#) (Dec. 14) The Environmental Protection Agency tightened the nation's soot standards by 20 percent, a move that will force communities across the country to improve air quality by the end of the decade while making it harder for some industries to expand operations without strict pollution controls. The new rule limits soot, or fine particulate matter, which stems from activities ranging from burning wood to diesel vehicle emissions and which causes disease by entering the lungs and bloodstream, causing inflammation. Fine particulate matter measuring less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, or one-thirtieth the width of a human hair, ranks as the country's most widespread deadly pollutant.

[Energy Dept. to Underwrite 7 Wind Projects](#) (Dec. 12) The federal government is stepping up its efforts to kick-start the offshore wind industry by awarding \$28 million in grants to seven projects that are developing varying kinds of power-generation technology. The Department of Energy said Wednesday that each developer would receive up to \$4 million to complete the engineering, design and permitting phases of their projects in six states. Three of the seven will then be selected to receive up to \$47 million over four years, subject to Congressional appropriations, for construction and installation, with the aim of having them begin commercial operation by 2017. So far, no offshore wind farm is operating in American waters. The projects are in Maine, New Jersey, Virginia, Texas, Ohio, and Oregon.

[US government announces opening of Atlantic coast for offshore windfarms](#) (Dec. 1) The Obama administration has for the first time opened up large areas off the Atlantic Coast for offshore wind farms. The department of the interior said it was proposing to offer competitive lease sales on some 278,000 acres, or about 432 square miles, off the coasts of Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Virginia. The sale is expected to go ahead in the first half of 2013.

## **International Update**

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[Coal to Approach Oil as Top Energy Source by 2017, IEA Says](#) (Dec. 18) Global coal demand will rise 2.6 percent annually in the next six years and challenge oil as the top energy source, according to the International Energy Agency. Usage will rise in all regions except the U.S., where cheap natural gas has damped demand, the IEA said. "Thanks to abundant supplies and insatiable demand for power from emerging markets, coal met nearly half of the rise in global energy demand during the first decade of the 21st Century," IEA Executive Director Maria van der Hoeven said. "Coal's share of the global energy mix continues to grow each year, and if no changes are made to current policies, coal will catch oil within a decade."

## **Research Articles and Reports**

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[New findings suggest there may be untapped potential to curb climate change by reducing soot emissions](#) (Jan. 15) Soot from burned wood and diesel exhausts may have twice the impact on global warming than previously thought, according to a new study published on Tuesday. The "black carbon" is said to be the second most important man-made agent of climate change. The findings, [published in the Journal of Geophysical Research Atmospheres](#), suggest there may be untapped potential to curb global warming by reducing soot emissions. Huge quantities of man-made soot enter the atmosphere every year. Around 7.5m tonnes was released in 2000 alone, according to estimates. It has a greenhouse effect two-thirds that of carbon dioxide, and greater than methane. The biggest source of soot emissions is the burning of forest and savannah grasslands. But diesel engines account for about 70% of emissions from Europe, North America and Latin America.

[Draft National Climate Assessment Released](#) (Jan. 12) The United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) released its draft National Climate Assessment this week, just a week after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration confirmed the United States experienced its warmest year on record. The report is the flagship climate change assessment for the United States, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

[Reports point to growing risks from climate change](#) ( Dec. 6) A report from the World Bank launched last month (18 November) warns that the planet "is on track for a four degrees Celsius warmer world" by 2100, marked by extreme heat waves, declining food stocks, loss of biodiversity and life-threatening sea level rise. This is double the generally accepted two degrees Celsius threshold beyond which catastrophic climate change impacts are expected. According to the report, ['Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must Be Avoided'](#), the negative effects of a warming climate would especially hit the world's poorest regions.