CEEPC Monthly Updates – May 2012

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

Events

- ✓ **May 24**: Public Hearing on EPA Carbon Pollution Standard; Ariel Rios East Building, Rm 1153; 8:30 am – 4:30 pm.
- ✓ **May 30**: Broadband and Energy Efficiency; Brookings Institution, Falk Auditorium; 10:00 – 11:30 am.
- ✓ **May 30**: Water and the Future of Energy; Hosted by Environmental Law Institute and ZAG/S&W; 1666 K St NW; 4:00 – 5:00 pm.
- ✓ **June 21**: World Green Energy Symposium; Washington Post Conference Center
- ✓ **June 21:** 15th Annual Congressional Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency EXPO + Forum; 345 Cannon House Office Building

Climate, Energy, and Environment News

Region making progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (May 19). The Washington region's municipalities have met most of their preliminary goals in a region-wide effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050, according to the Climate Change Progress Report released by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

Consumers Willing to Pay (a Little) More for Clean Energy (May 14). A new study of public opinion finds that people are in fact willing to pay to move to cleaner energy. Analyzing a survey they conducted in 2011, researchers at Harvard and Yale found that the average United States citizen was willing to pay $162 a year more to support a national policy requiring 80 percent "clean" energy by 2035. Nationwide, that would represent a 13 percent increase in electric bills.

U.S. Coal Generation Drops 19 Percent In One Year, Leaving Coal With 36 Percent Share Of Electricity (May 14). According to new figures from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, coal made up 36 percent of U.S. electricity in the first quarter of 2012 — down from 44.6 percent in the first quarter of 2011. That drop, which represented almost a 20 percent decline in coal generation over the last year, was primarily due to low natural gas prices.

Panetta: Environment Emerges as National Security Concern (May 3). Climate and environmental change are emerging as national security threats that weigh heavily in the Pentagon's new strategy, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told an environmental group last night. Panetta cited the melting of Arctic ice in renewing a longstanding call for the Senate to ratify the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea. More than 150 nations have accepted the treaty, which has been in force since the early 1990s, and a succession of U.S. government administrations has urged ratification.

Environmentalists urge Obama to attend Rio Earth summit (May 21). The leaders of nearly two dozen environmental groups called on President Obama to attend next month's Rio+20 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, underscoring the uncertainty that continues to cloud the historic meeting. More than 130 presidents, prime ministers and other heads of state have committed to attend the conference from June 20 to 22, which is also known as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. But many experts question whether the session — coming 20 years after a U.N. summit in Rio that concluded with three global environmental treaties — will produce a meaningful outcome. And the White House has not said whether Obama will travel there.

U.S. imposes tariffs on Chinese solar panels (May 17). The Commerce Department has slapped stiff tariffs on imports of Chinese solar panels, imposing 31 percent charges on the products of big Chinese manufacturers like Suntech and Trina. The duties will be retroactive for 90 days. The preliminary import duties were the result of a dumping case brought by a group led by SolarWorld, the U.S. subsidiary of a German company. The group said Chinese solar panel makers had violated World Trade Organization rules, using unfair cost advantages and selling panels in the United States at below-cost prices to drive U.S. manufacturers out of business. The duties will be reviewed again at the end of the year.

State Government Update

District of Columbia

District Celebrates Phase One Completion of LED Relighting Project (May 14). Lighting Science Group, one of the world's leading LED lighting companies, today joined Washington, D.C. Mayor Vincent C. Gray and officials from the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) and the Department of the Environment (DDOE) to celebrate the completion of the first phase of the relighting project that will save the city tens of thousands of dollars each year in energy costs. Part of the Mayor's larger vision for a Sustainable D.C., Lighting Science Group's energy-efficient, long-lasting street lights have replaced old, inefficient lights and will cut the District's annual carbon dioxide emissions by 719 tons.

D.C. Installed More Green Roofs in 2011 Than Anyone Else (May 3). According to Green Roofs for Healthy Cities, D.C. installed more green roofs than any other metropolitan area in 2011. Last year, the city added 800,000 square feet of green roofs; Chicago took second place with under 600,000 square feet added. Still, Chicago remains the nation's leader in green roofs, with over 3.5 million square feet installed between 2004 and 2011. D.C. comes in second with just over 2.5 million square feet for that same period, ahead of New York, Toronto, Vancouver, and Baltimore. As part of Mayor Vince Gray's recently released 20-year sustainability plan, D.C. will install another 1.5 million square feet of green roofs in the near future.

Maryland

Montgomery legislators to keep most of controversial energy tax increase (May 17). The Montgomery County Council will be keeping nearly all of a fuel and energy use that was set to sunset this year, legislators said Wednesday. Council officials have pledged to keep intact at least 90 percent of the fuel and energy tax increase. If the tax were to sunset entirely, the average annual bill would be $92 for a household and $2,772 for a business. Now the bill will be at least $231 and $4,233, respectively.

Some consumers oppose smart meters in Md. (May 20). In Maryland, the Public Service Commission will hold a hearing Tuesday to examine whether customers of the state's three largest utilities — BGE, Pepco and Delmarva Power and Light — should have a say in whether they will use smart meters. While utilities tout smart meters as a major step in modernizing the electricity grid, helping consumers to control energy use and save money, opponents worry about potential health effects and privacy and security risks. The Public Service Commission's staff, which makes recommendations to the regulatory body, opposes letting customers opt out because doing so would reduce the project's anticipated operational and cost efficiencies. The Maryland Energy Administration also is against such an option because it would hamper the ability of the smart meter grid to help attain the state's goals of reducing energy consumption by 15 percent by 2015.

Virginia

Dominion proposes incentive for solar power (May 18). Dominion Virginia Power proposes paying a premium price to encourage customers to install solar energy systems and sell the electricity generated to the company. The state's largest electricity company asked the State Corporation Commission Thursday for permission to buy solar-generated electricity from residential and small commercial customers at 15 cents per kilowatt-hour for a five-year demonstration period.

New Study Concludes Renewable Energy Will Create More Jobs Than Fossil Fuels in Virginia (May 4). In a recent study prepared by George Mason University for the Virginia Conservation Network, the authors concluded that a renewable energy mix would create 100,000 more jobs than a fossil fuel mix, for the same level of electricity production. The 2010 Virginia Energy Plan estimates that Virginia's additional need for energy in the next 25 years will increase by a total of 19,448 MW, and that half can be produced by solar, biomass, on-shore wind, and off-shore wind, and the other half by coal and natural gas.

Alexandria officials launched the Northern Virginia Home Performance with ENERGY STAR program (May 11). The City of Alexandria has launched of the Northern Virginia Home Performance with Energy Star program, to help resiodents overcome barriers to improving energy efficiency in their homes. The nonprofit group Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) and CommonWealth One Federal Credit Union (COFCU) have partnered with Alexandria to offer the program to residents.

Data centers in Va. and elsewhere have major carbon footprint, report says (April 17). All but one of the nation's major IT companies still rely on fossil-fuel energy to power more than half their cloud operations, according to a report issued by the advocacy group Greenpeace on Tuesday morning. More than half of U.S. Internet traffic passes through Northern Virginia, according to Thomas F. Farrell II, chief executive of Dominion Resources, a major utility pipeline and power company. The state hosts nearly three-quarters of the servers for the East Coast portion of Amazon Web Services, known as EC2 Cloud Hosting, as well as a major Microsoft facility. The major supplier for these data centers is Dominion Virginia Power, which gets 38 percent of its electricity from coal, 17 percent from gas, 42 percent from nuclear and 3 percent from renewables.

Federal Update

Senate panel to scrutinize government's role in advancing clean power (May 21). With many clean energy tax breaks headed toward a day of reckoning and Congress more divided than ever on the best way to meet America's future energy needs, members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will gather this week to get some advice from the business world on the government's proper role in bringing new technologies to market.

Battle over military energy efforts heads to the Senate (May 21). The fight over the military's alternative energy programs shifts to the Senate this week, after a pair of provisions targeting the efforts passed the House in the defense authorization bill Friday. Contending that their reliance on foreign sources of oil poses a national security vulnerability, the military branches have undertaken an ambitious effort to certify their ships and planes on American-made advanced biofuels. The Navy has taken a particularly proactive role, setting aggressive goals for its use of alternative fuels and seeking to use its purchasing power as a way of sparking the industry. But the Defense Department's efforts have turned controversial among Republicans, who say they take money away from more vital security programs at a time when the military budget is already absorbing $487 billion in cuts over the next decade and still has the threat of sequestration hanging over its head. Markup of the Senate defense authorization bill begins in subcommittee tomorrow and moves to the full Senate Armed Services Committee in a closed session Wednesday.

EPA Unveils Greenhouse Gas Rules for New Power Plants (March 27). On March 27th, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson issued a draft rule that places the first limits on greenhouse gas emissions from new power plants. The proposed rule will require any future fossil fuel-based electric utility generating units producing more than 25 megawatts to emit no more than 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt of electricity produced. The rule does not affect existing plants and provides an exception for coal plants that are already permitted and beginning construction within a year. Jackson called the proposed rule, "a common-sense step to reduce pollution in the air, protect the planet for our children and move us into a new era of American energy." EPA is accepting comments on the proposal for 60 days.

International Update

Growth of Carbon Capture and Storage Stalled in 2011. Global funding for carbon capture and storage technology, a tool for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, remained unchanged at US$23.5 billion in 2011 in comparison to the previous year, according to a new report from the Worldwatch Institute. Although there are currently 75 large-scale, fully integrated carbon capture and storage projects in 17 countries at various stages of development, only eight are operational—a figure that has not changed since 2009.

New CO2 Emissions Monitoring Technique Could Help Enforce Global Targets (May 14). A new technique developed by scientists from Harvard University and the University of Utah is able to detect changes in carbon dioxide emissions, according to a report published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Study co-author Jim Ehleringer said, "The ultimate use is to verify carbon dioxide emissions in the event that the world's nations agree to a treaty to limit such emissions." Researchers combined data from three carbon dioxide monitoring stations in Salt Lake City, Utah with information from regional weather stations to form the emissions estimates. Currently, nations self report emissions, which are not always verifiable, and the new method is a first step to the accuracy of five percent goal recommended by the National Academy of Sciences for enforcing an international agreement. The new model is accurate to within 15 percent.

China Considering Energy Use Cap (May 3). An energy consumption cap, equivalent to no more than 4.2 billion tons of coal, may be set by 2015, an expert in the sector told China Daily. A plan has been formulated following two years of talks with provincial-level governments and is awaiting State Council approval, Han Wenke, director general of the Energy Research Institute under the National Development and Reform Commission, said. China has set a target of cutting energy - calculated in units of energy for each unit of GDP - by 16 percent by 2015 from the 2010 level.

Research Articles and Reports

Car-Sharing Could Cut Carbon Emissions From Cars By 1.7 Percent (May 15). A recent study from the RAND Corporation estimates that the proportion of U.S. drivers participating in car-sharing programs could rise from 0.27 percent today to 4.5 percent if policies were put in place to support car-sharing. RAND attributes the greenhouse gas reductions from car-sharing to a) fewer vehicle miles traveled, b) fewer cars being manufactured, and c) more efficient vehicles being used more of the time. In the most optimistic scenario — 20.3 million car-share users, or about 36 times the current rate — car-sharing would reduce overall car emissions by 1.7 percent. A more realistic scenario of 7.5 million users, which would still require the widespread adoption of policies to support car-sharing, would lead to a 0.6 percent emissions reduction.

Infrastructure 2012: Spotlight on Leadership (May 9). This Report, produced by the Urban Land Institute and Ernst & Young, is the sixth in a series of annual reports exploring infrastructure investment and trends around the world. The series examines the subject from both national and global perspectives, and provides key insights on the future of infrastructure planning and funding. Highlights include a comprehensive overview of the current state of infrastructure in the United States and internationally; analysis of emerging approaches to infrastructure funding and financing at the federal, state, regional, and local levels; and recommendations on how state and local governments can make infrastructure projects happen despite constrained fiscal environments.

Beyond Boom and Bust: Putting Clean Tech on a Path to Subsidy Independence (April 17). Despite robust growth and recent improvements in price and performance, a boom in US clean energy technology ("clean tech") sectors could now falter as federal clean energy spending declines sharply, according to a new report published by the Brookings Institution, the World Resources Institute and the Breakthrough Institute. The report reviews coming changes to federal clean tech subsidies and programs, examines their likely impact on key clean tech market segments, and chart a course of policy reform that can advance the US clean tech industry beyond today's policy-induced cycle of boom and bust.

Related Editorial: **The End of Clean Energy Subsidies?** (NY Times, May 5)