Highlights from EPA Carbon Rules Listening Sessions

Region 4 (Atlanta) and Region 2 (New York City) Listening Sessions

On Wednesday, October 23rd, EPA held “public listening sessions” in Atlanta, GA, and New York, NY, aimed at finding the best Clean Air Act methods to reduce “carbon pollution” from existing power plants.

Reports from the Region IV session highlight the disconnect between the EPA’s messaging and the reality regarding public support for increased regulations. Our industry did a great job with owning the message; many co-op leaders’ hard work paid off in a strong showing by key stakeholders and allies.

In Atlanta, about 70 people were allowed to give testimony before the EPA panel about proposed regulations. The co-ops were well represented, including Oglethorpe Power, Georgia EMC, Greystone EMC, Sawnee EMC, Central Alabama Electric Cooperative, and Central Electric G&T. They used three minute statements allowed by EPA to argue against increased regulations by focusing on cost, fuel diversity, jobs, and economic harm of shutting down coal plants. And they didn’t hesitate to remind EPA that having all 11 sessions planned for this fall in urban areas slights rural citizens.

The co-ops had coordinated with other speakers and interest groups ahead of time including Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Consumers Energy Alliance, Southern Company, AFL-CIO, and the American Coalition for Clean Coal Energy. Several times, those speakers referred back to the co-op presentations or told stories about their friends or family who lives on co-op lines. Predictably, groups like Sierra Club and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy argued for increased regulations using vague arguments about saving the planet, and echoed the term “carbon pollution.”

In New York, we did not organize a delegation to head into downtown Manhattan for the listening session, but we sent John Novak from NRECA’s government relations department who spoke about our co-op concerns.

The overwhelming majority of the speakers talked about the seriousness of the global climate change issue, the need to do something about it, and the negative impact of coal plants on climate and human health. There were a number of references to personal experiences during Superstorm Sandy. A representative from Con Edison in NYC stated that Con Edison supports a cap and trade approach, that RGGI should qualify as an approach under 111(d), and that early movers should not be penalized. A representative from a group called the Small Business Majority (see <http://www.smallbusinessmajority.org/about-small-business-majority/> ) spoke in support of action to address climate change. NRECA and ACCCE were the only speakers not calling on EPA to take aggressive action. In all, about 50 speakers appeared in the morning session and about 40 in the afternoon.

A few logistical notes – even though EPA took online registrations, EPA staff also went through a process of requiring attendees to stand in line and sign up again in person, with speakers assigned a number on a first-come, first-serve basis. In Atlanta, co-op representatives showed up 90 minutes before the afternoon session began and were able to take the first 3 speaking slots.