

Environmental Protection Agency Clean Power Plan Testimony

Good evening, my name is Marissa Knodel and I recently moved to Washington D.C. from New England to join Friends of the Earth to campaign for laws and policies that mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change.

I am here to express support for the Clean Power Plan, which is laudable in that it proposes limits to carbon emissions from the dirtiest, most polluting sources of energy. I am concerned about the impacts of climate change on our nation for a number of reasons, but today I want to share with you a life-changing experience I had in October 2010 that truly puts a human face on climate change and highlights the importance of taking immediate action to mitigate it through the Clean Power Plan, but also the need to strengthen the Plan in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

In October 2010, I received funding to research the ways in which Native communities in Alaska are adapting to the changing climate, and whether those methods are perceived as disastrous for the community or opportunities to build resilience. The community I spent the most time in is called Kivalina, and it's located on an 8-mile barrier island in the Chukchi Sea, 80 miles above the Arctic Circle. Due to warmer sea temperatures, sea ice formation is unpredictable. No longer is the ice thick or extensive enough to support whale hunting in the spring, a core part of the Inuit subsistence lifestyle. In addition, the sea does not freeze until later in the winter, leaving the community vulnerable to flooding and erosion during the intense October storm season. In fact, the residents of Kivalina have earned the notorious distinction of being America's first climate refugees, as the Army Corps of Engineers determined the island will be inhabitable within the next several years.

Community displacement and permanent relocation are not adaptations confined to remote locations in the Arctic. I was living in Vermont when Tropical Storm Irene destroyed the homes of friends and neighbors, forcing them to not just relocate, but for many farmers, restart their livelihoods. A little over a year later, I was in Connecticut when Hurricane Sandy buffeted the coast, leaving me and thousands without power, and hundreds of others without shelter and basic amenities.

As the recent National Climate Assessment concluded, these types of extreme weather events will become the norm in a warming world. Stories of displacement and permanent relocation, especially among communities that are poor, vulnerable, and least able to adapt, will increase with them. Only by taking immediate action to stop the production of greenhouse gas emissions can we help to mitigate these negative impacts in the future. The emissions reductions in the Clean Power Plan are an important step in the right direction but not nearly stringent or fast enough. The people of Kivalina and many other vulnerable communities do not have until 2030 to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, and our nation cannot afford, from an environmental, economic, human rights, or justice standpoint to wait any longer.

I appreciate all of you taking the time to listen to my comments this evening. I support the Obama administration and the EPA in their efforts to reduce carbon emissions from existing power plants, but cannot emphasize enough the urgency of the situation our nation faces if those reduction targets are not increased with a goal year of 2020 instead of 2030. Thank you very much.