

Working to Fight Climate Change

From VOA Learning English, this is In The News.

Delegates from nearly 200 countries have spent the past two weeks in Warsaw, Poland. More than 9,000 representatives gathered for a United Nations conference on climate change. Organizers called the meeting to work toward a treaty to fight rising temperatures on our planet. The treaty would be signed in 2015 and take effect after 2020.

Several environmental groups walked out of the climate talks earlier this week. They were protesting what they considered a lack of progress towards a deal to limit carbon dioxide and other global warming emissions. Studies have shown links between such gases and the rise in temperatures.

In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency is leading government efforts to fight climate change. The agency just ended a series of public hearings across the country. The EPA was seeking comments as it considers tightening clean air rules for coal-burning power plants.

America's 1,000 coal-burning power plants supply 40 percent of the nation's electricity. The plants are responsible for one-third of the global warming emissions. The Obama Climate Action Plan has promised to cut the production of such gases.

Mitch McConnell is the leader of the Republican Party in the United States Senate. He spoke at the EPA hearing in support of his home state of Kentucky, which is a major coal producer.

“By now it is clear that this administration and your agency have declared a war on coal. For Kentucky, this means a war on jobs and on our state’s economy.”

Brian Patton also spoke at the EPA hearing. Mr. Patton comes from a long line of Kentucky coal mine workers. Today he is president of James River Coal Service. His company has dismissed 725 workers over the past six months. He fears that new rules could bring even greater hardship to an area that is already economically depressed.

“Understand, these are communities of just 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 people. And when you have that type of an economic impact due to regulations that come from Washington, DC -- that have very little understanding of what the outcome is for the local folks, for folks that get up and go to work every day and what that impact will be for their families in the future, and that’s wrong.”

David Doniger is a climate policy expert with the Natural Resources Defense Council, one of the nation’s largest environmental groups. He says it is the duty of the EPA to control carbon as a pollutant. He wants the agency to establish new rules that would move the United States toward a cleaner energy environment.

“No one is proposing standards that would knock out all those power plants. We’re talking about a shift from the dirtier ones to the cleaner ones, and from all those fossil fuel-powered ones towards renewable and even nuclear sources of energy.”

He says the government is responsible for protecting clean air, not protecting old and dirty power stations.

“That’s the only way that we can continue to have the way of life we want without running into the wall on climate change impacts, which in turn will come back and destroy the quality of life we have.”

The EPA is now considering comments from the nationwide hearings. The agency plans to announce proposed rule changes in June.

And that’s In the News from VOA Learning English. I’m Steve Ember.