

Findings and Recommendations for the Third Program Review

Frequently Asked Questions - Spring 2023

What is RGGI?

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is a program by 12 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states to limit the amount of carbon dioxide pollution (CO₂) from electricity generating plants in the region. Since 2008, RGGI has helped to achieve notable reductions in CO₂ and other pollutants while generating \$6.2 billion for states to invest in clean energy, efficiency and consumer benefits. States are now reviewing the RGGI program in 2023 offering the opportunity for public comment to improve its climate and health impact across the region.

Why is RGGI Important?

The nine states that have consistently participated in RGGI (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont) have experienced a more rapid increase in GDP per capita and a more rapid decline in power sector CO₂ emissions and retail electricity prices than the 40 states that have not consistently had a price on greenhouse gas emissions (hereinafter, the “rest of the country”). From 2008 through 2021, Acadia Center found that the RGGI states experienced:

- A nearly 50% reduction in CO₂ from power plants: 10% more than the rest of the country
- An increase in economic growth per capita of 50%: 13% more than the rest of the country
- A 3.2% decline in retail electricity prices compared to a 7.7% increase in the rest of the country
- A 91% decline in electricity generated from coal, and 808% growth in solar and wind

Has RGGI Improved Air Quality Across the Region?

Yes. RGGI has had significant positive reductions on air pollutants. RGGI has reduced emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) from RGGI covered plants by 85%. Criteria emissions, particularly NO_x, can damage the respiratory tract and increase vulnerability to respiratory infections and asthma.

Are Air Quality Benefits Experienced Equally in All Communities?

No. While air quality improved across the region, differences exist in localized impacts of power plants covered by the RGGI program. Acadia Center analysis found that, between 2008 and 2021:

- Over a third of RGGI plants that emit significant levels of NO_x emissions are located near high asthma communities (census tracts above 90th percentile in CEQ data for adults with asthma).
- NO_x emissions from power plants within 3 miles of an EJSI community (above 90th percentile on at least one of U.S. EPA's EJScreen socioeconomic indicators) declined by 85%, compared to the rest of the RGGI power plant fleet, where NO_x emissions declined by 88%.
- Over two-thirds of RGGI plants do not have an active air quality monitoring site within a 3-mile radius—and over three quarters of these unmonitored plants are near an EPA EJSI or high asthma community.

With Federal Climate Action Like the Inflation Reduction Act, Why Should I Care About Regional Programs Like RGGI?

RGGI is the first multi-state program in the United States to reduce climate pollution from power plants. Federal regulations do not yet regulate CO₂ in an entire sector like RGGI does. RGGI could be an important part of how a federal CO₂ program would work in the RGGI region. Now is the time for communities, affected groups, and the public to advocate for changes that create a more equitable and direct distribution of investments in environmental justice communities, use the power of regional cooperation to improve air quality and health of communities that surround the power plants covered by RGGI and better align RGGI with state climate and clean energy mandates.

What Improvements Does Acadia Center Recommend?

Acadia Center recommends that during the Third Program Review the RGGI states should:

- **Align the Cap and Market Mechanisms with State Climate and Clean Energy Goals:** Set the RGGI cap level at or below the emissions allowed under state clean energy and GHG reduction laws and adjust market mechanisms to support higher levels of decarbonization.
- **Ensure Environmental Justice Communities Directly Benefit:** Require that no less than 40-50% of RGGI proceeds are invested in EJ communities, ensure meaningful participation in investment decisions by EJ community members, and transparently track and report expenditures and impact.
- **Use the Power of Regional Cooperation to Improve Health and Air Quality:** Accelerate decreases in NOx emissions at the power plants that pose the largest respiratory health risks, and increase funding and enforcement of air quality monitoring, especially in EJ communities.
- **Lower the 25 MW Threshold Capacity for RGGI Regulation to 15MW:** 91% of smaller generating units are within 3 miles of an EPA EJSI or high asthma community. By including all generating units of 15MW or higher, and lower for co-located units, RGGI could have a significant health benefit in these areas.

Why Would Targeting Regulations to Key Power Plants Make a Difference?

Fossil fuel power plants can emit high levels of asthma-causing pollution, and many are located very close to large numbers of people that have long been subject to extensive air pollution. RGGI can reduce this health and pollution burden if the states focus on ways to target emissions reductions in the most impactful facilities.

How Do We Know Which Plants Should Be Targeted?

To help identify some of the most problematic power plants in the RGGI region, Acadia Center developed a “NOx pollution threat score”, based on how much NOx the plant emits, how many people live within 3 miles, and whether the plant is near EPA EJSI or high asthma communities. This tool identified the “NOx Threat Ten” list of power plants that pose the largest respiratory health risks to EJ and high asthma communities. Acadia Center recommends that RGGI states target decreases in emissions from these plants.

How Can I Participate?

RGGI states will be offering public comment and listening opportunities in the coming months. Acadia Center will be offering a webinar on **April 11, 2023**, at noon (EST) to provide information from our RGGI Report that can be used in commenting to RGGI states in the public processes they will be starting soon. We will be preparing additional materials to help interested parties provide comments to the states.

Who is Acadia Center?

Acadia Center is a regional non-profit research and advocacy organization that for nearly 25 years has been advancing climate solutions to build a clean energy future that benefits all residents and communities. Acadia Center has long been involved in RGGI advocacy issues since the program’s inception in 2008. For more information, please see www.acadiacenter.org

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