

Every federal agency must consider climate change

By Chris Mooney, Washington Post

In the past several weeks alone, the Obama administration has made multiple moves to fight climate change. The administration announced new steps to help fill U.S. roadways with electric vehicles. It ruled that greenhouse gas emissions from aircraft endanger human health and welfare. And on the international stage, it moved the world closer to a deal to phase out super-polluting HFCs, chemicals in refrigerants and other industrial substances that warm the climate.

But as Obama's term dwindles, the act isn't over – the White House released yet another policy to fight climate change, one with potentially far-reaching consequences. The White House's chief environmental office, the Council on Environmental Quality, finalized a six-year process of shaping how the government's agencies, across the board, will factor climate change into their decisions.

The council's new guidance involves what activists and environmental lawyers know as "NEPA" – one of those exceedingly wonky policies that is nevertheless critical to how the modern federal government functions. NEPA is short for a foundational 1969 environmental law, the National Environmental Policy Act, that required federal agencies to consider environmental consequences of their actions – all kinds of actions, ranging from granting a permit to drill on public lands to building a new road or bridge.

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