

Obama Orders Cuts in Federal Greenhouse Gas Emissions

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President Obama signing an executive order on Thursday to cut the federal government's greenhouse gas emissions. Credit Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — [President Obama](#) signed an executive order on Thursday to set new goals for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of federal agencies, his latest use of his executive authority to address the root causes of [climate change](#) and press private companies and foreign governments to follow suit.

Mr. Obama's directive orders federal agencies over the next decade to cut their emissions by an average of 40 percent compared with their levels when he won office in 2008, and to increase their use of electricity from renewable sources by 30 percent.

The goals are in line with a commitment that he [announced in November](#) as part of a climate agreement with China. In the deal, Mr. Obama said the United States would reduce its emissions of the heat-trapping gases that are warming the planet by 26 percent to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.

They are also part of Mr. Obama's effort during his last two years in office to use an expansive interpretation of his presidential authority to push ahead with unilateral moves to combat [climate change](#) in the face of strong opposition from the Republican-controlled Congress to advancing legislation that would do so.

"We're proving that it is possible to grow our economy robustly while at the same time doing the right thing for our environment and tackling climate change in a serious way," Mr. Obama said during a visit to

the Energy Department on Thursday to announce the order. “America once again is going to be leading by example.”

The federal government’s share of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States is minuscule — less than 1 percent in 2013, the last year for which data is available — so the order by itself is unlikely to make a major dent in the president’s broader goals to cut emissions.

But because the federal government is the largest user of energy in the United States economy — encompassing 360,000 buildings, 650,000 fleet vehicles and \$445 billion in annual spending on goods and services — it has the potential to influence private companies to step up their emissions-cutting targets.

In conjunction with the executive order, the Obama administration released a new scorecard to allow federal suppliers to disclose their emissions and track their reductions. Several large companies that do business with the federal government — including I.B.M., General Electric, Honeywell and Northrop Grumman — announced new emissions-cutting goals of their own.

“As we get economies of scale, and demand for solar and wind and other renewable energies grows, obviously that can help drive down the overall price, make it that much more efficient, and we start getting a virtuous cycle that is good for the economy and creates jobs here in America,” Mr. Obama said after touring the Energy Department’s solar-paneled rooftop.

At a round table with representatives of some of the private corporations taking part, Mr. Obama praised the companies for stepping up with new or enhanced emissions-cutting targets.

“You guys have done an outstanding job,” he said. “Because of the prominence of many of the companies here, and the fact that they’ve got a whole bunch of suppliers up and down the chain, what you do with respect to energy efficiency is going to have a ripple effect throughout the economy.”

Mr. Obama’s directive extends a goal he set during his first year in office, when he signed an executive order to cut federal greenhouse gas emissions by 28 percent by 2020.

Since then, said Christy Goldfuss, the managing director at the White House Council on Environmental Quality, federal agencies have reduced their emissions by 17 percent, and increased, to 9 percent from 3 percent, the share of electricity they consume from renewable sources.

White House officials, who are increasingly describing Mr. Obama’s environmental agenda in economic terms, estimated that the directive issued on Thursday could save up to \$18 billion over the next decade by cutting down on wasted energy.

“For federal agencies who are looking at how to cover their energy needs, this is a very pragmatic dollars-and-cents issue,” said Brian Deese, a senior adviser to Mr. Obama. “If they can consume less energy or they can consume renewable energy that is cheaper, more reliable or more sustainable, then they can achieve their environmental goals while they are saving money.”

Having failed during his first term to push a [cap-and-trade](#) bill through Congress, Mr. Obama has undertaken a systematic effort to regulate pollution through the existing [Clean Air Act](#), advancing new rules on emissions from cars and trucks, power plants and oil and gas wells.

Mr. Obama has also laid out an ambitious overall emissions-cutting goal for the United States ahead of a United Nations climate conference in December in Paris, and is expected by the end of the month to release his detailed plan for reaching those targets.