

## Supporters Back Carbon Regs

By **ELLIE POTTER**

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**HARRISONBURG** — About two dozen people spoke in support of proposed carbon regulations Wednesday evening, with many calling for even stricter measures in what they see as a first step to combating climate change.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality hosted a hearing at its Harrisonburg office, which about 60 people attended, to accept comments on the potential regulations.

Though the Republican-led General Assembly rejected Democratic Gov. Ralph

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**The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality holds a hearing on proposed regulations aligning the state with the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.**

Daniel Lin / DN-R

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Proposed Regulations Would Begin In 2020

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Northam's attempts to join a 10-state cooperative effort to reduce power plants' carbon dioxide emissions, Northam is working to go around the legislature and imitate the effort.

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which includes Maryland, formed the "first mandatory market-based program" in the U. S. in 2009 to cut greenhouse gas emissions, according to the initiative's website.

The cap-and-trade program requires power plants to buy pollution credits at regional auctions to meet emissions requirements, the price of which the state can increase to encourage pollution reduction.

The money the states generate from the auctions can then be invested into clean or efficient energy programs or other initiatives.

Although Northam said it was a priority, legislation allowing Virginia to join the initiative failed in the General Assembly this year.

As proposed, the state's new regulations would begin in 2020, giving entities more time to reduce their emissions before it takes effect.

State officials also are seeking comments on whether the first year of the regulation should cap emissions at 33 million tons or 34 million tons, a cap that would decrease by 3 percent each subsequent year. Most everyone who stood at the podium Wednesday said they supported the department's efforts, with many calling for further actions such as putting a cap on methane emissions.

Many also said the carbon emissions cap should be set lower, suggesting 30 million to 32 million tons instead. Ruth Jost, 68, of Rockingham County, said she's pleased to see that Virginia could be a "leader among Southern states."

"We know we need to act to reduce carbon," she said. "We know that carbon caps work and allow the market to allocate burdens in the smartest way, so now we have a chance to work with states near our region and we can benefit from their expertise as well as their impressive actual experience." Watt Bradshaw, 64, of Rockingham County, president of the renewable energy firm Blue Ridge Energy, said the main obstacle he's faced over his 39-year career has been that the carbon industries have not had to pay for their emissions.

"If they had to pay for their pollution, we wouldn't be here right now talking about this because the most economical solutions to this problem would have already been introduced and developed," he said. "The technologies are there, we just have to make them a little more broadly applied."

The main difference of opinion came over biofuels. John Rainey, director of origination and plant operations for the Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative, countered that biofuels are "carbon neutral."

Biofuel plants in Virginia take scrap wood from logging companies and burn them to produce electricity, he said. Logging companies would normally just burn the wood outside, where the emissions are not controlled at all. But the cooperative has a permit with the DEQ and has to limit its emissions, he said.

The department will host a hearing at its location in Woodbridge today at 5 p. m. and in Richmond on Monday at 1:30 p. m. The department will accept comments until April 9.

To send a comment or request more information, call Karen Sabasteanski at 804-698-4426, email her at [ghg@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:ghg@deq.virginia.gov) or mail them to P. O. Box 1105, Richmond, VA 23218.

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**Chris Bolgiano of Fulks Run speaks during a Virginia Department of Environmental Quality hearing Wednesday in Harrisonburg.**

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