

January 28, 2021

President Biden To Sign Executive Actions To Tackle The Climate Crisis

Today, President Biden will sign new executive actions to tackle climate change at home and abroad, a move that the administration says will put the United States on the path to reducing its share of emissions that are warming the planet.

The Administration said that these executive actions will address the climate crisis "while creating good-paying union jobs and equitable clean energy future, building modern and sustainable infrastructure, restoring scientific integrity and evidence-based policymaking across the federal government, and re-establishing the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology."

The president plans to deliver remarks and sign the orders at 1:30 p.m. Biden's special climate envoy John Kerry and national climate advisor Gina McCarthy are set to brief reporters on the administration's plans.

Key measures included in the executive actions:

1. A pause on entering into new oil and natural gas leases on public lands or offshore waters to the extent possible.
2. Directing federal agencies to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies as consistent with applicable law and identify new opportunities to spur innovation, commercialization, and deployment of clean energy technologies and infrastructure.
3. Setting a target of conserving 30% of the nation's lands and oceans by 2030.
4. Establishing climate considerations as an essential element of U.S. foreign policy and national security.
5. Scheduling an April 22 (Earth Day) summit with world leaders aimed at toughening emissions-cutting efforts.

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6. Establishing the National Climate Task Force, assembling leaders from across 21 federal agencies and departments to enable a whole-of-government approach to combatting the climate crisis.
7. Direct agencies to "coordinate investments and other efforts to assist coal, oil and natural gas, and power plant communities."
8. Directs federal agencies to procure carbon pollution-free electricity and clean, zero-emission vehicles by "Made in America" companies.
9. Establishing a White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council and a White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council to prioritize environmental justice and ensure a whole-of-government approach to addressing current and historical environmental injustices.
10. Take steps to address the higher pollution exposure among the poor and communities of color. This includes a "Justice40 Initiative" aimed at "delivering 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities."

The executive actions also includes:

Center the Climate Crisis in U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security Considerations

- The order clearly establishes climate considerations as an essential element of U.S. foreign policy and national security.
- The order affirms that, in implementing – and building on – the Paris Agreement’s objectives, the United States will exercise its leadership to promote a significant increase in global ambition. It makes clear that both significant short-term global emission reductions and net zero global emissions by mid-century – or before – are required to avoid setting the world on a dangerous, potentially catastrophic, climate trajectory.
- The order reaffirms that the President will host a Leaders’ Climate Summit on Earth Day, April 22, 2021; that the United States will reconvene the Major Economies Forum; that, to underscore the administration’s commitment to elevating climate in U.S. foreign policy, the President has created a new position, the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, which will have a seat on the National Security Council, and that it will be a U.S. priority to press for enhanced climate ambition and integration of climate considerations across a wide range of international fora.
- The order also kicks off the process of developing the United States’ “nationally determined contribution” – our emission reduction target – under the Paris Agreement, as well as a climate finance plan.
- Among numerous other steps aimed at prioritizing climate in U.S. foreign policy and national security, the order directs the Director of National Intelligence to prepare a National Intelligence Estimate on the security implications of climate change, the State Department to prepare a transmittal package to the Senate for the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, and all agencies to develop strategies for integrating climate considerations into their international work.

Take a Whole-of-Government Approach to the Climate Crisis

- The order formally establishes the White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy – led by the first-ever National Climate Advisor and Deputy National Climate Advisor – creating a central office in the White House that is charged with coordinating and implementing the President’s domestic climate agenda.
- The order establishes the National Climate Task Force, assembling leaders from across 21 federal agencies and departments to enable a whole-of-government approach to combatting the climate crisis.

Leverage the Federal Government’s Footprint and Buying Power to Lead by Example

- The order directs the Secretary of the Interior to pause on entering into new oil and natural gas leases on public lands or offshore waters to the extent possible, launch a rigorous review of all existing leasing and permitting practices related to fossil fuel development on public lands and waters, and identify steps that can be taken to double renewable energy production from offshore wind by 2030. The order does not restrict energy activities on lands that the United States holds in trust for Tribes. The Secretary of the Interior will continue to consult with Tribes regarding the development and management of renewable and conventional energy resources, in conformance with the U.S. government’s trust responsibilities.
- Consistent with the goals of the President’s Build Back Better jobs and economic recovery plan, of which his clean energy jobs plan is a central pillar, the order directs the federal agencies to procure carbon pollution-free electricity and clean, zero-emission vehicles to create good-paying, union jobs and stimulate clean energy industries.
- In addition, the order requires those purchases be Made in America, following President Biden’s Buy American executive order. The order also directs agencies to apply and strictly enforce the prevailing wage and benefit guidelines of the Davis Bacon and other acts and encourage Project Labor Agreements. These actions reaffirm that agencies should work to ensure that any jobs created with funds to address the climate crisis are good jobs with a choice to join a union.
- The order directs each federal agency to develop a plan to increase the resilience of its facilities and operations to the impacts of climate change and directs relevant agencies to report on ways to expand and improve climate forecast capabilities – helping facilitate public access to climate related information and assisting governments, communities, and businesses in preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.
- The order directs federal agencies to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies as consistent with applicable law and identify new opportunities to spur innovation, commercialization, and deployment of clean energy technologies and infrastructure.

Rebuild Our Infrastructure for a Sustainable Economy

- The order catalyzes the creation of jobs in construction, manufacturing, engineering and the skilled-trades by directing steps to ensure that every federal infrastructure investment reduces climate pollution and that steps are taken to accelerate clean energy and transmission projects under federal siting and permitting processes in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Advance Conservation, Agriculture, and Reforestation

- The order commits to the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and oceans by 2030 and launches a process for stakeholder engagement from agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, Tribes, States, Territories, local officials, and others to identify strategies that will result in broad participation.
- The order also calls for the establishment of a Civilian Climate Corps Initiative to put a new generation of Americans to work conserving and restoring public lands and waters, increasing reforestation, increasing carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protecting biodiversity, improving access to recreation, and addressing the changing climate.
- The order directs the Secretary of Agriculture to collect input from farmers, ranchers, and other stakeholders on how to use federal programs to encourage adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices that produce verifiable carbon reductions and sequestrations and create new sources of income and jobs for rural Americans.

Revitalize Energy Communities

- The order establishes an Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization, to be co-chaired by the National Climate Advisor and the Director of the National Economic Council, and directs federal agencies to coordinate investments and other efforts to assist coal, oil and natural gas, and power plant communities.
- The order tasks the new Interagency Working Group to advance projects that reduce emissions of toxic substances and greenhouse gases from existing and abandoned infrastructure and that prevent environmental damage that harms communities and poses a risk to public health and safety – such as projects to reduce methane emissions, oil and brine leaks, and other environmental harms from tens of thousands of former mining and well sites.
- In addition, the new Interagency Working Group is also directed to explore efforts to turn properties idled in these communities, like brownfields, into new hubs for the growth of our economy.

Secure Environmental Justice and Spur Economic Opportunity

- The order formalizes President Biden's commitment to make environmental justice a part of the mission of every agency by directing federal agencies to develop programs, policies, and activities to address the disproportionate health, environmental, economic, and climate impacts on disadvantaged communities.
- The order establishes a White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council and a White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council to prioritize environmental justice and ensure a whole-of-government approach to addressing current and historical environmental injustices, including strengthening environmental justice monitoring and enforcement through new or strengthened offices at the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Justice, and Department of Health and Human Services. The new bodies are also tasked with advising on ways to update Executive Order 12898 of February 11, 1994.

- The order creates a government-wide Justice40 Initiative with the goal of delivering 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities and tracks performance toward that goal through the establishment of an Environmental Justice Scorecard.
- The order initiates the development of a Climate and Environmental Justice Screening Tool, building off EPA's EJSCREEN, to identify disadvantaged communities, support the Justice40 Initiative, and inform equitable decision making across the federal government

Scientific Integrity Presidential Memorandum

The Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking directs agencies to make evidence-based decisions guided by the best available science and data.

The memorandum charges the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) with the responsibility for ensuring scientific integrity across federal agencies. The OSTP Director is directed to review the effectiveness of agency scientific-integrity policies and assess agency scientific-integrity policies and practices going forward.

In addition, agencies that oversee, direct, or fund research are tasked with designating a senior agency employee as Chief Science Officer to ensure agency research programs are scientifically and technologically well founded and conducted with integrity. All agencies – not just those that fund, conduct, or oversee scientific research – must designate a senior career employee as the agency's Scientific Integrity Official to oversee implementation and iterative improvement of scientific-integrity policies and processes.

Executive Order Establishing The President's Council Of Advisors On Science And Technology

Leaders across the Biden-Harris Administration, including the President himself and his senior advisors in the Executive Office of the President, will seek input, advice, and the best-available science, data, and scientific and technological information from scientists, engineers, and other experts in science, technology, and innovation.

This order re-establishes the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST). The PCAST– co-chaired by the President's Science Advisor – will advise the President on policy that affects science, technology, and innovation. The Council will also advise the President on scientific and technical information that is needed to inform public policy relating to the economy, worker empowerment, education, energy, environment, public health, national and homeland security, racial equity, and other topics.

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