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CSG outlines the top five issues in energy and environment policy for 2017, including an uncertain future for federal environmental policy, infrastructure, water quality and management, solar energy, and natural gas.

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Uncertain Future of Federal Environmental Policy
The election of President Donald J. Trump in November called into question the future of Obama administration policies, such as the Clean Power Plan and the Clean Water Rule, and what role states will play in guiding energy and environmental policy going forward. These rules have not yet been implemented at the state level, pending the outcome of litigation, but in the case of the Clean Power Plan, states that have been supportive of the policy have continued to implement policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions, while some states opposing the plan halted efforts to comply or reduced planning efforts. The United States is currently on track to meet the goals set in the Clean Power Plan, but Trump has vowed to remove the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate change and roll back the reach of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Infrastructure
The deputy secretary of the Army said in a court filing on Feb. 7 that a final permit needed to complete the Dakota Access Pipeline will be granted, clearing the final bureaucratic hurdle for the controversial 1,170-mile-long pipeline project. But conflicts over the placement of and potential water quality and other adverse impacts from the Dakota Access and other natural gas pipelines likely will continue as the need for natural gas infrastructure expansion confronts concerns for environmental protection and property rights. Replacing aging water infrastructure, a need brought to light by the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, will also remain on state agendas in 2017.

Water
Water quality and management will also continue to be an issue in 2017. Droughts continue to plague many states—particularly in the South and West—and water management will be a key issue for state leaders going forward. States such as California, which appears to have largely emerged from five
years of drought, will need to take steps now to prepare for future droughts. Many states also share interstate water resources and states will have to cooperate to ensure effective use and management. Meanwhile, with the Trump administration’s promise to roll back environmental regulations and increase fossil fuel production, state policymakers should expect concerns over water quality impacts to increase.

**Solar Energy Policies**
Net metering, the policy that allows rooftop solar customers to receive a credit on their electric bill for any excess energy they provide to the electric grid, is a policy that almost every state addressed in one way or another in 2016. According to North Carolina State University’s Clean Energy Technology Center, 47 states and the District of Columbia took some type of solar policy action. Twenty-eight states considered or enacted changes to net metering policies. Expect states to continue to determine how to value the solar power the customer-generator provides to the grid and to develop more creative policies that address how customers interact with the grid as technology continues to advance.

**Natural Gas**
The Trump administration has stated its intent to increase natural gas production and roll back fossil fuel regulations, including those relating to methane. While agriculture is believed to be the most likely source of new methane, recent research shows that methane leaks from the natural gas supply chain are more widespread than previously thought. Environmental Protection Agency regulations that require companies to plug methane leaks at new or modified oil and gas operations and on some federal lands have been viewed by the industry as overreach, and Trump and his EPA administrator nominee Scott Pruitt believe such regulations drive up the cost of doing business and kill jobs. States will continue to be largely responsible for regulating natural gas production within their borders. Last year saw numerous conflicts over whether local governments could more stringently regulate natural gas production. Those conflicts are expected to continue in 2017.