Alternative energy has consistently improved over the years. Wind, solar, geothermal, and hydroelectricity technology have gradually made their mark in America’s energy production as producers and consumers look for alternatives to fossil fuels. State governments have been increasingly mandating alternative energy goals and implementation of alternative energy sources where feasible – 30 states have alternative energy mandates and eight states have voluntary requirements. Now, the Environmental Protection Agency’s decreased regulations on coal-fired power plants are providing states more choice about their energy future.

The California Energy Commission voted to require the installation of solar panels on all new constructions after 2020. The mandate states that this approach is cost effective and will contribute to reducing the carbon footprint by eliminating the equivalent of taking 115,000 fossil fuel cars off the road. They estimate the plan will increase mortgage payments by $40 per month but save consumers $80 per month on heating, cooling and lighting bills.

More recently, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill mandating 100 percent zero-emission energy by the year 2045. Though California is not the first state to set a high target for alternative energy usage—Hawaii enacted the same goal in 2015—they are leading the way with their actions.

Massachusetts enacted HB 4857 in August. The act seeks to increase usage of alternative energy sources during peak times. It enacts the clean peak standard, which aims to meet peak demand of the electrical grid with clean energy resources. The concept is like a Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) in that providers of alternative energy earn credits for each kilowatt-hour of clean energy delivered to the grid, but in this case, credits are only earned for energy delivered during specified hours of peak grid demand, or the Clean Peak Window.

In November, the Fourth National Climate Assessment was released and stresses the importance of diverting energy production away from traditional methods to mitigate climate change. The report even goes on to say that the changes in the energy sector – including the displacement of coal by natural gas and increased deployment of renewable energy – paired with policy actions at the national, regional, state, and local levels are reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.

The aging power grid continues to draw national attention. In states where energy is largely fossil fuel based, the production facilities are increasing in cost to maintain, with an estimated cost of $5 trillion to completely replace the grid. Ultimately, the increase of alternative energy sources will only continue to rise as the nation becomes less dependent on fossil fuels as their primary provider of energy. This is a trend state policy makers must continue to recognize and provide the basis for the necessary economic development associated with the industry.

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Tags: Alternative energy, Natural Gas, Wind Energy, coal, energy, fossil fuels, gas, power grid