» The Clean Power Plan
On Aug. 3, 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalized the Clean Power Plan, which is expected to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants by 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. The rule sets target emissions reductions for states, and states are responsible for designing their own plans to meet these emissions reductions targets. Emissions reductions targets vary by state and range from 7 to 47 percent. States must submit plans, or initial plans with a request for a two-year extension, by Sept. 6, 2016. As part of designing these plans, states will need to decide how to measure their emissions reductions, what methods they will use to comply with the emissions limits, and whether they will engage in a trading program to purchase compliance credits. Some states have indicated that they will refuse to comply with the rule, which would make those states subject to a federal plan designed by EPA. EPA expects to finalize its federal plan and model trading rules in 2016.

» The Rise of U.S. Natural Gas Production
The use of hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling techniques to develop shale gas resources has contributed to a tremendous increase in natural gas production in the United States. States will face a variety of policy issues as natural gas production continues to increase and will look to balance the protection of the environment and public health with the economic benefits of the increased use of natural gas. The increase in natural gas production also impacts the country’s natural gas infrastructure and has and will continue to result in the increased use of natural gas in electricity generation and in fuels for vehicles.

» Electricity Transmission, Ratemaking and Grid Reliability
Recent technologies have resulted in new demands being placed on the nation’s electricity grid. From rooftop solar panels to smart grids that can digitally monitor electricity flow and batteries that store energy for use at more critical times, the ways that we produce and transmit electricity are changing dramatically. These technological advances also are changing the traditional relationships between consumers and utility companies, and policymakers will be involved in resolving some of these issues. For example, while most states have net metering policies in place, states increasingly are revisiting these policies in an effort to ensure grid reliability is maintained and the costs for maintaining and updating the grid are properly allocated. Technological innovations also are creating new issues involving cybersecurity, especially involving the security of the nation’s electric grid.

» Water Quality and Quantity
States continue to deal with a variety of water quality and quantity issues. Aging wastewater and drinking water treatment infrastructure, nutrient runoff from farms and associated algal blooms, stormwater runoff, and industrial water pollution are all issues that will continue to impact access to safe drinking water and can contribute to other environmental problems. Another key issue is the EPA’s finalization of its Clean Water Rule, which will increase the waters subject to regulation under the Clean Water Act by 3 to 5 percent, according to EPA estimates. The rule is currently tied up in litigation and implementation of the rule has been stayed nationwide. In addition, several regions of the country have struggled with water shortages and policymakers will increasingly address, often on a multistate level, how water is used, allocated and discarded. These issues are key for policymakers as the demand for clean water continues to increase.

» The Use of Science-Based Decision Making
What is “science” and how do legislators, regulators, judges and other officials determine when the science being presented is based on sound scientific principles? As the availability of data increases at a dramatic rate and the platforms by which we can receive data continue to expand, policymakers are bombarded with information often without the time or means to determine its accuracy. The use of science-based decision making will be an essential skill as data becomes more available and immediate.

For more information on these topics and for additional resources on energy and environment policy, see » www.csg.org/top5in2016.
Liz Edmondson joined CSG in September 2015 as the director of energy and environmental policy. Prior to joining CSG, Liz ran her own law firm in Lexington, Ky., where she represented clients on a range of energy and environmental issues. In this capacity she also conducted policy analysis and lobbying for clients on issues ranging from net metering to the siting of wind turbines. Edmondson also has worked on high profile government contracts relating to coal mining and has provided legal and technical assistance to policymakers on improving environmental outcomes on surface coal mining operations in Appalachia.

Edmondson graduated from the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law, cum laude. She also serves as the chair of the Kentucky Bar Association’s Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Law section, is a published author, and regularly speaks to attorneys, students and others on energy and environmental issues.

Get Involved

CSG provides state leaders a variety of regional and national opportunities to actively engage on issues of importance to their jurisdictions and constituents. CSG’s regional and national committees and task forces are designed to encourage multi-state problem solving, the sharing of best practices, and networking among state officials and between the public and private sectors.

CSG’s Energy and Environmental Policy Task Force is co-chaired this year by Rep. Brad Witt, Oregon, and Rep. Pat Garofalo, Minnesota. Over the past two years, the task force has focused on several key issues, including net metering polices, distributed energy sources like wind and solar, and analyzing the EPA’s proposed carbon emissions rule.

The committee will hold several two and a half day policy academies in 2016 to allow attendees to experience in-depth education on emerging issues. Past policy academies have focused on issues such as natural gas, consumer product safety, and electricity. In addition, the committee puts on webinars and provides other educational material to members throughout the year. The next committee meeting will occur at the 2016 CSG National Conference in Colonial Williamsburg, Va.