



**National Conference of State Legislatures
Office of State-Federal Relations**

Jan. 15, 2016

Department of Interior Launches Review of Coal Leasing Program

On Jan. 15, the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) [announced](#) it will be launching a comprehensive environmental review of the federal government's current coal leasing practices on public lands. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, coal mined on public lands accounts for about 40 percent of the total coal production in the U.S., with the majority of that activity happening in Wyoming.

The environmental review aims to explore possible effects of the coal mining program on climate change, wildlife and public health, and will evaluate potential reforms. Specifically, DOI will study "how, when, and where to lease" public lands for coal mining; how to account for public health impacts from coal production; and best practices to ensure that revenue from the coal production is properly being returned to taxpayers.

DOI plans to institute a moratorium on new coal leasing until the environmental review is completed. The moratorium will not apply to existing coal production activities, and there will be some exceptions made for new coal leasing related to coal used in steel production or for emergency situations related to supply needs. Additionally, pending leases that have already undergone an environmental analysis and received a final record of decision will be allowed.

Public sessions to determine the scope of the review will begin in "early 2016" and DOI will release an interim report by the end of 2016. The full review is expected to take approximately three years.

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