USA - Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)

General Information

ETS Description

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), the first mandatory GHG ETS in the United States, launched in 2009. It started operating with ten states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont). Its development was based on the “2005 RGGI Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU) and on the “2006 RGGI Model Rule”. Through statutes or regulations based on the Model Rule, each state then established individual CO_2 budget trading programs. New Jersey withdrew from RGGI at the end of the first control period in December 2011 and later rejoined in 2020, while Virginia joined in 2021.

RGGI covers power sector emissions in participating states. In 2020, it covered around 14% of the aggregate participant states’ emissions; in 2021, 228 facilities were covered by the state regulations. The aggregate cap will reduce by 30% compared to 2020 between 2021 and 2030. Regulated entities obtain most of their allowances through regular auctions, while some states have “set-aside” accounts from which they may transfer a limited number of allowances to entities’ compliance accounts.

RGGI has undergone two review processes that updated the Model Rule and enshrined tighter caps and adjustments to system design. RGGI’s third review process is currently ongoing.

ETS Status

in force

Jurisdictions

Connecticut
Delaware
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
New Hampshire
New Jersey
Rhode Island
Vermont
Virginia
New York

Year in Review

In April, Pennsylvania published its CO_2 Budget Trading Program regulation, under which covered entities in Pennsylvania had to begin accounting for their emissions from July. Prior to its publication, the regulation was challenged by members of Pennsylvania’s legislature. The lawsuit resulted in the issuance of a preliminary injunction preventing implementation and enforcement of the regulation. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is currently appealing the Commonwealth Court’s injunction order in the state's Supreme Court. The regulation has also been disputed in front of the Commonwealth Court in two separate cases. Until legal proceedings are concluded, the Pennsylvania DEP will not take steps to implement or enforce the RGGI regulation.

The RGGI states initiated the Third Program Review in summer 2021 to analyze the program's successes, impacts, potential additional reductions to the cap post-2030, and other design elements. In 2022, states gathered comments from stakeholders, held a series of public meetings, and discussed comments received together with a variety of program topics. They also worked to develop and refine their electricity sector modelling assumptions, which will inform the modelling of reference and policy scenarios to be conducted in 2023. As per the current timeline for the program review, released in November 2022, an updated draft Model Rule would be released in Fall 2023, with the program review concluding in December 2023.

Sectoral coverage

Power

Emissions & Targets

Overall GHG Emissions excl. LULUCF (MtCO2e)

595.4 million tons CO_2* (2020)

* This value includes Virginia but not Pennsylvania. Values presented here are taken from the "Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks by State" by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, available here), aggregated for the RGGI states. While each state publishes official inventory data and the values published by the EPA should not be viewed as official state data, the EPA estimates are presented here to ensure the methodological consistency of data collection and aggregation for inventory categories across RGGI states, as well as to ensure a common reporting year in the data. There may be differences between the EPA estimates and the official state inventories.

GHG reduction targets

By 2030: 30% cut in power sector emissions compared to the 2020 CO_2 emissions cap (2017 Model Rule)

Note: The participating states have their own emission targets; economy-wide targets are not defined at the level of RGGI.

Current Allowance Price (per t/CO2e)

USD 13.46 (average price in 2022; updated prices available here)

Size & Phases

Covered emissions (2020)

14.00%

Verified ETS Emissions

66.80MtCO_2e

GHGs covered

CO2

Phases

FIRST PHASE: 2009-2011

SECOND PHASE: 2012-2014

THIRD PHASE: 2015-2017

FOURTH PHASE: 2018-2020

FIFTH PHASE: 2021-2023

Cap

A cap trajectory until 2030 has been set.

FIRST PHASE (2009-2011): 564 million short tons CO_2 or 512 $MtCO_2$ (188 million short tons CO_2 or 171 $MtCO_2$ per year)

SECOND PHASE (2012-2014): 413 million short tons CO_2 or 374 $MtCO_2$

2012-2013: 165 million short tons CO_2 or 150 $MtCO_2$ per year

2014: 83 million short tons CO_2 or 75 $MtCO_2$

THIRD PHASE (2015-2017): 194 million short tons CO_2 or 176 $MtCO_2$

2015: 67 million short tons CO_2 or 61 $MtCO_2$

2016: 65 million short tons CO_2 or 59 $MtCO_2$

2017: 62 million short tons CO_2 or 57 $MtCO_2$

FOURTH PHASE (2018-2020): 193 million short tons CO_2 or 175 $MtCO_2$

2018: 60 million short tons CO_2 or 55 $MtCO_2$

2019: 58 million short tons CO_2 or 53 $MtCO_2$

2020: 74 million short tons CO_2 or 67 $MtCO_2$

FIFTH PHASE (2021-2023)****:*** 291 million short tons CO_2 or 264 $MtCO_2$

2021: 101 million short tons CO_2 or 91 $MtCO_2$

2022: 97 million short tons CO_2 or 88 $MtCO_2$

2023: 93 million short tons CO_2 or 85 $MtCO_2$

By 2012, verified emissions under RGGI were more than 40% below the cap, so the states tightened the cap in 2014. There was a 2.5% annual reduction factor from 2015 through 2018. The revised regulations extended the 2.5% annual reduction factor through 2020.

The RGGI states further adjusted the caps between 2014 and 2020 to account for banked CO_2 allowances from the first and second phases. The annual reduction factor between 2021 and 2030 as set out in the “2017 Model Rule” is ~3% of the 2020 cap.

The caps above include New Jersey from 2020 and Virginia from 2021.

*These values do not include Pennsylvania.

Sectors and thresholds

Fossil fuel electric generating units. Most RGGI states cover units with capacity equal to or greater than 25 MW. In New York, since January 2021, the program applies to power plants that have nameplate capacity equal to or above 15 MW and reside at a regulated generating unit or near two or more units of the same source.

Point of regulation

Point source

Number of entities

228* (current control period)

*This value does not include Pennsylvania.

Allowance Allocation & Revenue

Allowance allocation

CO_2 allowances issued by each RGGI state are distributed through quarterly auctions. States hold a limited amount in “set-aside” accounts and distribute them according to state-specific regulations.

Of the 101 million 2021 allowances, 91% were sold at auction and 2% were sold at fixed price. The remainder were either transferred from, retired, or remained in set-aside accounts. Additionally, almost 4 million 2021 allowances from the cost containment reserve were sold (see ‘Market Stability Provisions’ section).

Total Revenue

USD 5.9 billion since the beginning of the program

USD 1.2 billion in 2022
2022

Use of Revenues

Revenues from the quarterly auctions are returned to the RGGI states and have been primarily invested in the following consumer benefit programs: energy efficiency, renewable energy, direct energy bill assistance, and other GHG reduction programs. A report released in May 2022 found that the direct lifetime benefits of RGGI investments made in 2020 include USD 1.9 billion in lifetime energy bill savings and 6.6 million short tons of CO_2 (6 $MtCO_2$) emissions avoided.

The distribution of RGGI investments in 2020 was: energy efficiency (35%); direct bill assistance (19%); clean and renewable energy (18%), beneficial electrification* (11%); greenhouse gas abatement** (5%).

* Programs implementing or facilitating replacement of fossil fuel use with electric power.

** Programs promoting the research and development of advanced energy technologies, the reduction of vehicle miles traveled, GHG reductions in the power generation sector, tree-planting projects designed to increase carbon sequestration, and other initiatives to reduce GHGs.

Flexibility & Linking

Offsets and credits

QUANTITATIVE LIMIT: 3.3% of an entity’s liability may be covered with offsets. This share will remain the same between 2021 and 2030.

QUALITATIVE LIMIT: Currently, the program allows offset allowances from three offset types located in RGGI states:

(1) landfill methane capture and destruction;

(2) sequestration of carbon due to reforestation, improved forest management, or avoided conversion; and

(3) avoidance of methane emissions from agricultural manure management operations.

Some states have discontinued specific offset protocols, but all accept offset allowances issued by any participating state. To date, only one offset project (landfill methane capture and destruction) has been approved under RGGI.

Banking and borrowing

Banking of allowances is allowed without restrictions. Current regulations include provisions to adjust the cap to address the aggregate bank, so that allowances available for auctions are reduced by the number of allowances not used for compliance in previous control periods (see also ‘Cap’ above). The RGGI states are currently implementing the third adjustment for banked allowances, which runs until 2025. As part of the RGGI review process, RGGI states are considering whether to address or adjust for banked allowances into the future if a bank of surplus allowances remains in circulation post-2025.

Borrowing is not allowed.

Links with other Systems

RGGI is a cooperative effort between participating states. Each state establishes an individual “CO_2 budget trading program” based on the RGGI Model Rule. Regulated sources in each participating state can surrender allowances issued by any participating state for compliance and participating states use joint auctions.

Compliance

Monitoring, Reporting, Verification (MRV)

REPORTING FREQUENCY: Quarterly

VERIFICATION: Emission data reports and their underlying data are required to undergo periodic quality assurance and quality control procedures in accordance with US EPA regulations.

FRAMEWORK: Emissions data are recorded in the US EPA’s Clean Air Markets Division database in accordance with state “CO_2 Budget Trading Program” regulations and agency regulations. Provisions are based on the US EPA monitoring provisions. Data are then automatically transferred to the electronic platform of the RGGI CO_2 Allowance Tracking System (RGGI COATS), which is publicly accessible.

Enforcement

In case of excess emissions (i.e., if entities do not surrender all required allowances), allowances equivalent to three times the number of excess emissions must be surrendered. Furthermore, covered entities may also be subject to specific penalties imposed by the RGGI state where it is located.

Compliance Period

Compliance is evaluated at the end of each three-year phase, or “control period”. From the third phase, regulated entities must surrender allowances corresponding to 50% of their verified emissions in each of the first two years of a phase. They must cover 100% of the remaining allowances at the end of the three-year phase.

Market Regulation

Market Stability Provisions

AUCTION PRICE FLOOR: USD 2.50 per short ton in 2023, increasing by 2.5% per year (to reflect inflation).

RESERVES: Since 2014, RGGI has operated with a cost containment reserve (CCR), consisting of a quantity of allowances in addition to the cap, which are held in reserve and only released to the market when certain trigger prices are reached. Beginning in 2021, allowances provided within the CCR will be equal to 10% of the regional cap. The trigger price is USD 14.88 in 2023 and increases by 7% per year. It had previously increased by 2.5% annually between the years 2017 and 2020, from a starting value of USD 10.

The CCR was triggered in 2014 and 2015 and all 15 million allowances it contained were sold. The CCR was also triggered in the last quarterly auction of 2021, where 3.9 million of the available 11.9 million allowances were sold.

In 2021, RGGI started implementing an emissions containment reserve (ECR). Under the ECR, allowances are withheld from auction if certain trigger prices are reached, up to an annual withholding limit of 10% of the emission budgets (i.e., the share of each state in the regional cap) of participating states. Allowances withheld will not be re-offered for sale, effectively adjusting the cap downward. In 2023, the trigger price is USD 6.87, increasing by 7% per year thereafter. Maine and New Hampshire are not participating in the ECR.

Market Design

MARKET PARTICIPATION: Compliance entities, non-compliance entities (domestic and international) and individuals can participate if they provide a financial security.

MARKET TYPES:

Primary: Most CO_2 allowances issued by each RGGI state are distributed through quarterly regional auctions. The RGGI COATS records and tracks data for each state's CO_2 Budget Trading Program, including the transfer of allowances that are offered for sale by the states and purchased by the winning qualified bidders in the quarterly auctions. Auctions are open to all parties with financial security, with a maximum bid of 25% of the volume on offer per sale. There is no allowance holding limit. Auctions are managed by Enel X.

Secondary: The secondary market for RGGI CO_2 allowances comprises the trading of physical allowances and financial derivatives, including futures, forwards, call options, and put options. RGGI COATS facilitates participation in the secondary market and enables the public to view and download RGGI data and CO_2 allowance market activity reports. Financial derivatives are traded on the ICE platform.

Potomac Economics, an independent market monitor, monitors the performance and efficiency of the RGGI CO_2 allowance auctions and the secondary CO_2 allowance market.

LEGAL STATUS OF ALLOWANCES: The RGGI Model Rule specifies that allowances are limited authorizations by the participating state's regulatory agencies to emit up to one ton of CO_2.

Other Information

Institutions involved

Statutory and/or regulatory authority of each RGGI state: Each state implements the program under its particular statutory authority.

Environmental and energy agencies for each RGGI state: Agencies implementing the respective CO_2 budget trading programs.

RGGI Inc.: Non-profit cooperative supporting RGGI's development and implementation. This includes engaging contractors for various tasks including allowance and emissions tracking, market monitoring, and management of the auctions.

Potomac Economics: Current market monitor. Monitors the conduct of market participants in the auctions and in the secondary market to identify indications of anti-competitive conduct.

Enel X: Manages the auctions.

Regulatory Framework

2017 RGGI Model Rule
2017 RGGI Model Rule Updates (Summary)
RGGI States' Statutes & Regulations
RGGI Program Design

Evaluation / ETS review

The RGGI participating states periodically review the ETS program to consider program successes, impacts, and design elements. The first program review process (known as the 2012 Program Review) was completed in early 2013. A second review process was completed in 2017, resulting in the “2017 Model Rule”. Program reviews were accompanied by stakeholder meetings to facilitate stakeholder engagement and the submission of comments from interested parties.

The RGGI states initiated the third review in summer 2021 to analyze program successes, impacts, potential additional reductions to the cap post-2030, and other design elements. The review is expected to be concluded in 2023.

Disclaimer

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