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ASSOCIATION

Actionline

WASHINGTON, D.C.

February 28, 2013 – VOLUME 10, ISSUE 2

EPA amends Portland cement regulation

On Feb. 12, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) amended a regulation regarding hazardous emissions from Portland cement manufacturing facilities.

The amendments to the National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants largely affect the standards for particulate matter. Specifically, the numeric emissions value for existing manufacturers, based on manual stack testing, changes to 0.07 pounds per ton (lb/ton) clinker and 0.02 lb/ton clinker for new and reconstructed manufacturers. Additionally, acceptable organic hazardous air pollutant levels are changed to 12 parts per million.

The amendments also include provisions that account for commingled hazardous air pollutants from coal mills, establish a continuous monitoring regime for monitoring particulate matter, and impose civil penalties for violations of emission limits.

EPA has indicated the new standards will save the industry $52 million annually. Cement manufacturers will have until Sept. 9, 2015 to comply with the requirements for existing sources of particulate matter and Feb. 12, 2014 to comply with the existing open clinker storage pile requirements.

Obama rehashes agenda in State of the Union

On Feb. 12, President Obama delivered the annual State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress. The president used the speech as an opportunity to articulate an ambitious and aggressive agenda.

From tax reform to infrastructure investment, President Obama hit on many of ACPPA's legislative priorities. While the association was pleased to see several of its key issues mentioned in the address, it was disappointed with the lack of concrete policy proposals.

Additionally, it will require a bipartisan approach to achieve lasting success on the most important matters in Washington. The association urges the president to work closely with GOP leaders in the House and Senate to find permanent solutions to the nation's challenges.

Tax reform, deficit reduction, and sequestration
Echoing the association's position, President Obama declared, "Now is our best chance for bipartisan, comprehensive tax reform that encourages job creation and helps bring down the deficit."

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Yet, when it comes to reforming the nation's tax code, the devil is in the details. The president's past statements indicate that he will strongly push House and Senate leaders on a broad range of measures designed to enhance federal revenues with less of a focus on entitlement reforms and immediate reductions to reduce the size of the federal government. Recognizing that no party will be satisfied 100 percent with the reform process, however, the president acknowledged the need for "modest reforms" to programs such as Medicare. When it comes to reforming corporate tax rates, Obama has largely focused on eliminating business tax expenditures, which in the president's view includes important accounting features classified as "gimmicks."

With just days remaining until the March 1 impact of sequestration, the package of automatic, across-the-board federal spending cuts instituted in 2011 as a way to encourage progress on deficit reduction, the president called on Congress to avoid sequestration's blow. "These cuts would certainly slow our recovery, and cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs," Obama said.

Infrastructure investment

On infrastructure issues, the president called for a "Fix it First" program to help repair deteriorating roads and bridges while putting Americans back to work. He also unveiled a "Partnership to Rebuild America," a program to attract private capital to upgrade American infrastructure.

However, in reading the President's Plan for a Strong Middle Class & a Strong America, released to provide more detail on his remarks, it becomes clear that these ideas appear to be recycled from past proposals. Funding for the Fix it First program would come from the "peace dividend," savings from ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an idea panned by congressional leaders. The Partnership to Rebuild America, meanwhile, bears similarities to prior calls for an infrastructure bank that have languished in Congress.

Energy production

President Obama praised recent investments in energy production, noting that America is "finally poised to control our own energy future." Yet, while recognizing increased oil and gas production, the president placed more emphasis on renewable efforts, whose impact on America's transformed energy output pales in comparison to the benefits derived from unconventional oil and gas extraction. To truly achieve energy independence, America's energy producers need freedom from overly burdensome regulations – not State of the Union platitudes.

Trans-Pacific Partnership

The president used the speech as an opportunity to renew the administration's commitment to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an important trade pact between Pacific nations. Obama pledged to complete negotiations by the year's end.

In addition to improving Canada's access to global markets, Canada's participation in the TPP will benefit both the U.S. and Canadian economies by improving efficiencies for companies doing business on both sides of the border.

Act now!

It is critical that ACPPA members keep the pressure on the administration and lawmakers to ensure that action is taken on these important matters.

Where President Obama was short on details, ACPPA will be working with lawmakers to ensure that final solutions have a positive impact for the construction industry. On areas where the association and the president differ, ACPPA will work closely with elected officials to protect its members' interests.

To urge your members of Congress to take immediate action on ACPPA's top legislative priorities, visit the new ACPPA-action.org today!

Congress punts debt-limit debate to late spring

On Feb. 4, President Obama signed into law a bill (H.R. 325) to suspend the debt limit until May 19. In addition to putting off a major debt battle, the bill requires both chambers of Congress to pass budgets by April or it will force lawmakers to give up their pay.

CCC Senior Vice President of Policy Warren Everson

H.R. 325 made its way through the legislative process quickly, avoiding the protracted political debates that have confronted similar bills recently. The rapid movement reflects a growing consensus within the GOP that fights over the debt-limit are a political loser.

The move, however, does not provide a permanent solution to the debt-ceiling problem. By delaying an ultimate resolution, lawmakers bought themselves more time to focus on the automatic across-the-board spending cuts to all federal agencies scheduled to go into effect on March 1 (which, as Actionline went to press, looked likely to occur). Additionally, Congress must deal with funding the federal government before the current continuing resolution expires on March 27. As May 19 approaches, sparks could again fly over this contentious issue.

ACPPA is urging lawmakers to reach a tax and deficit reduction deal that simultaneously puts the nation's fiscal house back in order while restoring certainty to the federal tax code.

Canadians warm to infrastructure policy

Actionline recently sat down with Warren Everson, senior vice president for policy at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC) to capture his insights on how infrastructure policy is shaping up in the Great White North. ACPPA is an active member of the CCC.

Actionline: Warren, Building Canada, the $8.8 billion fund for construction projects, is set to expire in 2014. What does the CCC see as the future of this critical program?

Everson: It is increasingly clear that Canada needs long-term investment in our core public infrastructure. The Building Canada Plan was a very helpful initiative, but its expiration in 2014 has created some uncertainty. Our members are calling for a longer-term, predictable funding model. We hope to see a commitment to this effect in this year's federal budget.

Actionline: What actions is the CCC taking to ensure robust investment in the nation's infrastructure programs?

Everson: The Chamber network has identified infrastructure as a key pillar of Canada's competitiveness. This year we're running a special infrastructure project to ensure that our infrastructure is among the most competitive in the world. The goals of this project are to ensure that all levels of government and the private sector are working together effectively to plan and implement the needed investments; to secure long-term commitments for public infrastructure investment; and significantly improve how we leverage private sector financing for Canadian infrastructure projects.

Actionline: A recent CCC report on the top ten barriers to competitiveness identifies public infrastructure planning and investment as one of the chief barriers undermining productivity. Can you talk about the current situation of Canada's transportation needs specific to water infrastructure and surface transportation?

Everson: Earlier this month, we launched the second edition of the Top 10 Barriers to Canadian Competitiveness project—a major advocacy and outreach initiative which focuses on addressing ten key impediments to Canada's competitiveness. The theme of competitiveness is not a new one but it remains top of mind with many Canadian business leaders. We have a competitiveness challenge and exceedingly poor productivity growth that is impeding Canada's prosperity. Our share of global trade is shrinking and our businesses are facing greater direct competition both on home turf and abroad.

It's not surprising that infrastructure has found a place on our list. Canada faces some significant challenges in this area. For example, some of Canada's largest cities are struggling with major congestion problems. Recent measurements of commute times across the country put us well above the global norm for similar sized cities. Despite our smaller population, three Canadian cities rank on the Top Ten most congested cities in North America, with Vancouver coming in second behind Los Angeles. But it's not just our cities that are in trouble; roads and bridges across the country are in dire need of repair. The same is true for Canada's water systems. A recently released Infrastructure Report Card found that 30% of Canadian wastewater plants, pumping stations, and storage tanks are in need of attention. It will cost about $39 billion to replace this wastewater infrastructure. There is simply not enough available funding to cover the necessary investments. That's why we need to look at new funding options and to ensure that our money is being used effectively.

Actionline: Are there any positive signs that lawmakers are indicating willingness to provide solutions to meet water infrastructure and surface transportation needs?

Everson: The current government seems to understand the scale of the problem, but we will have to see what the next federal budget holds. Last year they undertook extensive consultations on the next wave of infrastructure funding. While this Long Term Infrastructure Plan is cause for optimism, we have to remember that the federal government is trying to reduce the deficit. It's likely that new spending programs will be modest. Instead we will probably see a greater focus on attracting private sector investment and less government spending in the near term.

Actionline: What can members of CCC, like ACPPA, do to educate Canadian lawmakers on the need for adequate water infrastructure and surface transportation resources?

Everson: Keep up the pressure and continue to provide examples of the costs of infrastructure failure. Governments have to understand the risks associated with delay. It can be hard to explain why a road needs to be ripped up for several weeks. It becomes much easier to understand when a water main break floods your own basement. We also need to make the case that deferring on these investment's today will only increase the cost tomorrow.

CBO/TTI reports confirm gloomy Highway Trust Fund numbers

On Feb. 5, Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Texas Transportation Institute unveiled new reports confirming the Highway Trust Fund's (HTF) dismissal future and the consequences of inaction.

CBO's report projects the impending demise of the HTF. According to the report, the fund will be bankrupt by Fiscal Year 2015, one year after the most recent highway bill, MAP-21, expires. The CBO's projections estimate a $92 billion annual shortfall by 2023 unless lawmakers find new and sustainable revenue streams.

New research from the Texas Transportation Institute found that in 2011 congestion cost Americans more than $121 billion in wasted time and fuel.

Now is the time for bold action to ensure the vitality of our nation's highway system. Visit ACCPA-action.org today to urge your lawmakers to find new revenue streams for the HTF.

New Keystone route approved, senators urge action

On Jan. 22, Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman (R) signed off on a revised route for the Keystone XL oil pipeline that avoids the state's most environmentally sensitive regions. The following day, a bipartisan group of more than 50 senators sent President Obama a letter urging approval of the project.

The green light from Nebraska's governor will likely clear the way for a conclusion by the president regarding the pipeline's future. However, the project first requires a new draft supplemental environmental impact statement from the State Department followed by a comment period and revisions.

While the president has indicated his desire for an "all-of-the-above" approach to securing American energy independence, his recent pivot toward climate change legislation could endanger the pipeline's progress. Should the president slow-walk approval, Sen. John Hoeven (R-N.D.) has indicated his willingness to introduce legislation that would bypass the need for a presidential permit.

NAWC, US Chamber launch water infrastructure campaign

The National Association of Water Companies (NAWC), in partnership with the US Chamber of Commerce, recently launched a national campaign to raise public awareness about the dire condition of the nation's water infrastructure.

The "Water Is Your Business" campaign highlights the ever-growing cost of doing nothing and encourages the public to take action at the local level to restore a world-class infrastructure system. The coalition notes that while the nation's waterworks are 30 times the length of the national highway system, the majority of that network was laid in the first half of the 20th century and that older pipes are more likely to fail.

Given the critical role water plays in the economy, the campaign draws on the initiatives of local lawmakers around the country and seeks to engage local community and business leaders to influence water infrastructure policy. The effort also highlights key statistics demonstrating the increasingly dismal outlook for the nation's water management system absent renewed investment. The campaign cites EPA estimates that more than $300 billion is needed over the next twenty years for essential upgrades to overlooked pipes and sewers.

Federal support is crucial to leverage the private funding that pays for most of the cost of water infrastructure maintenance and replacement. Modernizing our national water infrastructure can improve commercial efficiency, increase U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, and create much-needed jobs in the near term.

As a member of the U.S. Chamber, ACPPA looks forward to supporting the campaign. The time to act is now. To learn more visit the campaign's website, and be sure to urge your lawmakers to act through ACPPA-action.org.