

Media Release – For Immediate Release

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CPS' Proposed Coal Plant Would Risk Public Health

San Antonio, TX “The proposed City Public Service (CPS) coal plant has major permit flaws, and is a bad idea in terms of public health and economics. Cleaner, more affordable options exist, and building a \$1 billion polluting 750-megawatt coal plant makes no sense. Energy efficiency and renewable energy should be used instead, and CPS' own study says that energy efficiency could save this much energy and more,” stated Chris Brown of Public Citizen. He and representatives of Smart Growth San Antonio, the SEED Coalition and the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club gathered today outside of a downtown hospital emergency room entrance, a location chosen to emphasize the health impacts of coal-burning power plant pollution.

“Existing San Antonio coal plants are already linked to 100 deaths and 2,815 asthma attacks per year in the San Antonio region. There are non-fatal heart attacks, emergency room visits for asthma and chronic bronchitis cases linked to the particle pollution from the plants. CPS should be cleaning up existing plants, and not adding back in and exceeding today's levels by building another plant,” noted Karen Hadden, Executive Director of the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition.

Hadden and others urged citizens to speak out and ask CPS questions at a public meeting scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 16th, at 7 PM at East Central High School, 7173 FM 1628 (Stuart Road.)

Sulfur, Particle Pollution, Nitrogen Oxides, Ozone – Permit lacks needed protections

The permit for the proposed plant is seriously flawed in that the sulfur reductions promised by CPS in November 2003, are not included. They are not a condition or requirement of the permit. Although CPS has committed to spend \$150 million for a scrubber at “Dirty Deely” power plant, the work isn't scheduled to be completed until 2013, and there are currently no permit requirements that hold CPS to this promise.

“CPS has a track record of exceeding pollution limits in its existing permits, for example they had 6000 opacity (soot) violations in less than three years. The major commitment to reduce sulfur by 90% at Deely should be included in the permit, but it's not there. Without the permit requirement, it will be hard for the community to hold CPS to their commitment to clean up “Dirty Deely,” noted Hadden.

The proposed 750 MW plant would “net out” of both nitrogen oxide and sulfur requirements with their PSD (Prevention of Significant Deterioration) permit, allowing CPS out of more detailed modeling. This might be assumed to mean that there will be no additional pollution, but the proposed Spruce 2 would result in an additional 2,102 tons per year of SO₂ pollution into the air in San Antonio. Sulfur causes acid rain and is part of the health-threatening particle pollution that cuts short lives and worsens respiratory conditions.

CPS's emission limits for sulfur (SO₂) will rise from 23,255 tons per year to 25,357 tons per year, a 9% increase and their sulfur pollution is already excessive, with 90% of the sulfur from all industries in the region (Bexar, Guadalupe, Comal, and Wilson Counties.) Five-minute sulfur spikes at ground level can be very dangerous to human health. The calculations done for the permit are based on average wind conditions, but sometimes there are only low winds, no wind at all, or temperature conversions, which can bring the sulfur down around the plant area in high concentrations and pose health risks.

A recent European study showed that small sulfur increases, only 10 micrograms per cubic meter over 24 hours, would lead to a 1% rise in hospital admissions for coronary problems within the next 48 hours. CPS increasing sulfur levels may lead to a rise in heart problems due to higher sulfur emissions.

Although it was promised by the CPS board, there has been no review of health impacts from the proposed plant, including adverse health effects associated with 5-minute SO₂ ambient exposures or cumulative impacts of combined pollutants.

Health impacts on San Antonio's children have not been studied. Children are not adequately protected since the state's ambient air guidelines, the Effects Screening Levels, are not set for nor intended to protect children's health.

The health-based pollution averages are instantaneous, like vehicle speed limits, but people don't hold their breath for 30 minutes to one hour, one of the time limits for short-term averages.

PM10/PM2.5, SO₂, and Ozone are deadly pollutants triggering increases in premature deaths. New medical studies are confirming that combustion particles, acid gases, and ozone are more deadly than previously thought and are so deadly that they contribute to increased premature mortality when these kinds of pollution increase slightly in the urban air from dirty sources like coal-burning plants.

More toxic mercury, instead of the reductions that are needed

The Calaveras Lake coal plants (Deely and Spruce) already rank 30th in the nation for mercury, putting them in the "Dirty Thirty" category. They should be reducing mercury by 90% at each of these plants, not adding to this toxic contamination that bioaccumulates in fish and threatens the health of exposed children. Mercury exposure can lead to permanent brain damage, learning disabilities, attention deficits and impaired vision and hearing. "It's outrageous that we have to worry about whether fish are safe to eat," stated Erin Zayko of Smart Growth San Antonio. She noted, "Texas Department of Health testing shows fish mercury levels in the San Antonio River that exceed EPA guidelines."

"Our membership has just a simple statement to make. We don't want mercury in our air. We don't want mercury in our water. We don't want mercury in our fish. We don't want mercury in our children's bodies. For this reason, we don't want another CPS coal power plant to be built, that will produce more of this toxic mercury, to poison our environment," said Loyd Cortez, a member of the Executive Committee of the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club.

The existing plants reported 661 pounds of mercury for 2002, then downgraded that figure by 25 pounds to 636 due to a reporting error.

Silica and Hydrochloric Acid (HCl)

Hydrochloric Acid is a strong acid gas that can burn lung tissue. The permit allows for higher levels than the Effects Screening Levels. For HCl, the 1-hour concentration is modeled to exceed the ESL by 36% and for 8 hours per year.

Coal dust has long been a problem and source of community complaints. Particulate matter from fugitive emissions and coal handling would be up to 53 tons per year.

Silica dust causes silicosis, or black lung. The permit allows a maximum 1-hour off-property concentration to exceed the Effects Screening Levels by 5 times. The permit (Section 13.3) reads, "Of significance, however, from a health effects standpoint, are the potential exposures to silica over more extended periods."

The maximum annual silica concentration off the CPS property is modeled to exceed the ESL by 38%. High concentrations could occur over Calaveras Lake and a small area north of the CPS property that is used for farming (plowed fields) and grazing. The permit states that "it is unlikely, based on the remote rural location in southeastern Bexar County, that the region of modeled concentrations in excess of either the short-term or annual ESL for silica would ever be a candidate for residential, commercial or institutional development."

CPS PROPOSED SPRUCE #2 STACK AND FUGITIVE AIR EMISSIONS: (From Permit)

CO emissions - 5,256 tons
SO₂ emissions - 2,102 tons
NO_x emissions - 1,752 tons
PM₁₀ emissions - 771 tons
H₂SO₄ emissions - 129 tons (Sulfuric acid)
VOC emissions - 88 tons
HCl emissions - 66 tons
NH₃ emissions - 66 tons
HF emissions - 26 tons Hydrofluoric acid (Total acid gases - 4,078 tons)
Lead emissions - 600 Pounds
Mercury (Hg) emissions - 140 Pounds

TOTAL NEW BOILER EMISSIONS = 10,256.39 TONS

Miscellaneous PM Emissions from Fugitives, Coal-handling, etc. - 53.3 tons

TOTAL SPRUCE #2 CRITERIA & TOXIC AIR POLLUTANTS - 10,300 TONS

HOW CPS + SPRUCE NO. 2 RANKS WITH THE YEAR 2000 STATE EMISSIONS INVENTORY DATA FOR TEXAS INDUSTRIAL PLANTS:

Ranks #2 - all Texas power plants - CO emissions - 6,968 tons
Ranks #4 - all Texas power plants - PM₁₀ emissions - 1,931 tons
Ranks #8 - all Texas power plants - Total Criteria emissions - 50,633 tons
Ranks #8 - all Texas power plants - NO_x emissions - 15,664 tons
Ranks #10 - all Texas power plants - SO₂ emissions - 25,357 tons

Ranks #4 - all Texas industrial plants - PM₁₀ emissions - 1,931 tons
Ranks #4 - all Texas industrial plants - CO emissions - 6,968 tons
Ranks #9 - all Texas industrial plants - NO_x emissions - 15,664 tons
Ranks #10 - all Texas industrial plants - total criteria emissions - 50,633 tons
Ranks #11 - all Texas industrial plants - SO₂ emissions - 25,357 tons

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