

Why CPS shouldn't spend a billion dollars on new coal plant

Citizens can express their opinion at a hearing on December 16th

By Erin Zayko- Smart Growth San Antonio

CPS is about to spend a billion dollars to build a new coal plant. In addition, it will burn \$100 million each year over the next 30 years in fuel to fire its boilers. That adds up to \$4 billion dollars. Not only will this plant cost a lot of money, it will unnecessarily emit a variety of harmful contaminants into our skies each year. A public meeting will be held Thursday night at 7 PM at East Central High School to give citizens an opportunity to comment on whether the air permit should be granted.

CPS says they are building one of the cleanest plants in the country while also reducing emissions at their existing coal plants, but look carefully at these facts.

The proposed plant would add a lot of pollution to our atmosphere: more than 6 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂); 140 lbs of brain-damaging mercury; particles that trigger asthma and heart attacks, silica that causes black lung disease, hydrochloric acid, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxide. This pollution is dangerous and will affect citizens' health and our climate for the 30-50 years this plant is expected to run.

Carbon dioxide gas contributes to global warming. Almost every scientist who studies the problem agrees that the climate is changing and that the results will be bad for public health. The impacts on central Texas will be severe. We'll see more heat waves and droughts like we saw in the late '90s, followed by torrential rains and floods. Far fetched? Ask the flood control experts. They'll tell you we've had two 500- year floods and a 250-year flood in just the last 6 years. Almost every other industrial country has agreed to limit their emissions of CO₂, and as a result those limitations are now international law. Without US compliance, trade sanctions may kick in and we may end up paying \$25 per ton for carbon emissions. Applied to all CO₂ emissions from this plant, this would add another \$200 million a year to the cost of operating the plant.

Mercury causes brain damage. Less than one teaspoon of mercury can contaminate a 20-acre lake. The proposed plant would add up to 140 lbs of mercury to the air each year. If a pregnant woman eats mercury-contaminated fish her child may have permanent brain damage, learning disabilities or attention deficits. In economic terms, that means more taxes paid by the average citizen for programs for children with special needs. CPS says that fish in the lake near the existing coal plants aren't contaminated, but fish in the San Antonio River have mercury levels that exceed EPA's guidelines.

Silica causes black lung disease, and the proposed plant would emit 5 times more silica than the state's Effects Screening Level. Fine particle pollution is known to trigger asthma and heart attacks. This plant would also expose people to levels of hydrochloric acid gas that exceed the state's effects screening level. CPS will tell you these emissions would only exceed safe limits for a few hours each year, but this exposure can have serious health impacts.

This coal plant isn't needed. An internal CPS study has found that conservation measures could save 1.6 times more energy than this polluting plant will produce. Some energy conservation methods include: tightening leaks, high performance windows, and using new high-tech lighting, appliances, and air conditioners that use a third of the energy consumed by the systems most of us have in our homes today. The choice that faces the city is simple. Would we be better off investing \$1 billion into a polluting coal plant or investing that same billion dollars (or even less) into making our homes and apartments cooler while at the same time reducing our electric bills? A billion dollars divided by the 500,000 houses and apartments in the city is about \$2,000 per home. That's a lot of efficiency.

Some say that San Antonians will never grasp energy conservation, but that's what they used to say about conserving water. San Antonio reduced water use by 30% and avoided spending billions of dollars to build an unneeded reservoir.

We don't need this plant, it will impact our health, and it will cost far more than energy efficiency. San Antonio residents can express their concerns about this plant at a public hearing at 7 PM Thursday the 16th at East Central High School.