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Tuesday, January 24, 2012

TOXIC COAL VS CLEAN ENERGY

New Report Examines How Kentucky Energy Policies Impact the Health of Kentucky Families

(Berea) In a state almost exclusively reliant on coal for electricity generation, a new health assessment released today concludes that people in Kentucky are sick from coal production, and that state officials need to urgently focus on how to create energy supplies that ensure the health and well being of all Kentuckians.

The “*Health Impact Assessment of Coal and Clean Energy Options*,” compiled and reviewed by public and environmental health experts in Kentucky, looks at the full-cycle impacts of coal, energy efficiency, and renewable energy options that are less harmful, and recommends that legislators support clean energy policies. One such policy is **HR-167**, the *Clean Energy Opportunity Act*, introduced in January 2012 by **Representative Mary Lou Marzian**.

Kathy Little, who lives near the **Cane Run** coal plant and coal ash site near Louisville, is concerned for the health of her granddaughter and other children in her neighborhood, due to air pollution from the toxic ash that fills the air. “Mothers in our neighborhood whose children have breathing problems have had physicians tell them they need to move away, and that’s just wrong,” she said. “Our children deserve to be able to play outside and breathe clean air without fear of an allergy or asthma attack.”

“A majority of Kentuckians believe that legislators should work to improve our health, and one sure way to do that is to improve our air quality through clean energy policy,” said **Deborah Payne, MPH**, Health Coordinator for the **Kentucky Environmental Foundation** and co-author of the health assessment. “Admitting that coal is hazardous to our health is a hard pill for Kentucky leaders to swallow, but study after study indicates that shifting to cleaner energy sources can alleviate costly illnesses and improve our quality of life.”

Health Impact Assessments (HIA) are increasingly used in the U.S. by governing bodies as a tool for making policy outside of the health sector. **Dr. Elizabeth Walker**, **Berea College** Health professor and co-author of the report, said, “The HIA process enables us to talk about energy policy in a new way, and uncover benefits we didn’t realize were possible.” Walker involved her students – many of whom come from coal mining communities or live near coal power plants – in the HIA research process and observed, “My students learned about the complexities of coal in Kentucky, about the split

between people needing coal mining for jobs but also suffering the health effects of coal mining and coal plant emissions. They came to understand that we in Kentucky have a right to both healthy jobs *and* a clean, healthy environment.”

Representative Marzian (D-Louisville) welcomed more open dialogue among Kentucky legislators about the health benefits of energy efficiency and renewable energy. “As a registered nurse I understand the ways in which pollution can affect public health, and as a legislator I understand the critical role elected officials play in determining the health future of our citizens,” she said. “Presented with the evidence of harm from coal and the potential benefits of energy efficiency and renewable energy, I believe it is imperative that health professionals and my colleagues in Frankfort join together in supporting healthy energy solutions.”

The HIA includes:

- Review of hundreds of scientific reports on the impacts of coal including mining, transportation, combustion and waste disposal.
- Cites for well-known health and illnesses, including black lung, miner accidents, soot and mercury deposition from coal plants.
- The migration of heavy metals and other contaminants from coal ash.
- Data on the health benefits of saving energy and generating electricity from renewable sources like solar, wind or hydro.
- Shows that while the best benefit of energy efficiency and renewable energy is in avoiding pollution from coal, the coal-alternatives hold other tangible benefits as well. For example, residents of weatherized homes experience fewer general illnesses than do people living in drafty, energy-leaking homes. Energy efficient lighting can improve brain function and productivity, and reduce eye strain. Renewable energies generate electricity without risky occupational hazards associated with coal, and once installed, produce no pollution.

Dr. Matthew Sleeth, MD, a physician, Evangelical Christian author and Kentucky resident said, “In my role as an emergency room director, I’ve seen first hand the disturbing health risks children suffer because of too much coal pollution in our air. As a Christian I believe that we in Kentucky – all of us as individuals and our elected officials – share a moral obligation to do whatever we can to conserve energy in order to preserve our health and all creation.”

Kentucky’s state and federal legislators have consistently supported the coal industry despite evidence of its health and economic harm. During the 2011 legislative session, **Governor Beshear** joined the Kentucky Coal Association in vehemently protesting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed regulation of coal mining pollution. State senators promoted a bill that would have declared Kentucky a “sanctuary state” for the coal industry against federal environmental pollution standards.

Elizabeth Crowe, Executive Director of the **Kentucky Environmental Foundation** said, “It’s time Kentucky legislators rally around saving lives, rather than the reputation of the coal industry, and stand up for the ability of our children to grow up healthy and strong. We’re ready for a new conversation about energy policy: decision making as if our health really matters.”

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Copies of the Health Impact Assessment can be found at <http://kentuckyenvironmentalfoundation.org>