



**For immediate release:**

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## **Swift approval of coal plant's pollution permit skirts new health protections** *State issues permit for EKPC plant despite numerous health and financial risks*

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WINCHESTER, Ky. – Despite diverse pleas from health officials, farmers, ratepayers and conservation groups, the Kentucky Division for Air Quality has issued a permit to East Kentucky Power Cooperative for the construction of a coal-burning power plant in Clark County.

The DAQ formally approved the permit Friday, the last day possible before new federal air pollution limits on smog-forming nitrogen compounds took effect Monday, meaning that EKPC's Smith plant will be allowed to emit higher levels of harmful pollutants than officials now recommend as safe. DAQ officials acknowledged in the permit that they were aware of the deadline for the new rules in their decision-making.

"By sliding the Smith air permit in right before the new, more protective federal air quality standards are in place, our state air quality agency is taking a huge step backward on Kentuckians' health," said Colleen Ambrose, a member of the Blue Grass Energy co-op and a registered nurse practitioner practicing in Madison County. "If EKPC and the state DAQ are not going to protect the public's health from the threat of air pollution, who will?"

Elizabeth Crowe, director of the Kentucky Environmental Foundation, said citizens and business interests have "all raised very valid concerns about the huge impact pollution from this plant is going to have on their health, lives and livelihoods, and rushing this permit through the door is simply irresponsible."

The permit also was issued as an independent management audit is underway to evaluate the soundness of EKPC's financial condition. The rural electric cooperative has asked the Kentucky Public Service Commission for approval to take on \$921 million in additional debt – on top of the \$2.6 billion it already owes. Its own documents show that it is on shaky financial ground, raising doubts it can sink nearly a billion dollars more into additional loans without risking failure.

“This air permit is environmentally risky and financially risky,” said Wallace McMullen, energy chair with the Kentucky Sierra Club. “If the Smith project moves forward, Kentuckians are going to pay a steep price for this mistake with their health and with their wallets.”

In February, health experts, business owners, coalfield residents, students and other Kentuckians whose air and water would be harmed by pollution from the Smith plant, testified at a DAQ hearing, asking the agency to deny the permit for the 278-megawatt plant because of the impact pollution from its smokestacks will have. Burning coal releases a number of harmful pollutants, such as soot, sulfur and nitrogen compounds, mercury and other heavy metals, and hazardous chemicals, many of which can cause cancer and other illnesses. Many of those attending the hearing also submitted written comments to the DAQ detailing their concerns about the plant’s risks to public health.

The American Lung Association of Kentucky urged DAQ in its comments to consider cleaner energy alternatives before issuing a permit for burning coal, saying “it is vitally important for Kentucky to shift its generation of electrical energy from coal to other less polluting forms of energy that are more protective of public health.”

According to the air pollution permit, the Smith plant, which would burn coal with outdated technology, would emit thousands of tons of harmful pollutants if built. The pollution permit would allow its smokestacks to put out:

- More than 300 tons of soot, which can cause severe respiratory problems and even death
- Nearly 2,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, the main cause of acid rain
- Nearly 1,900 tons of nitrogen oxides, a key chemical in the formation of ozone pollution, or smog, which harms lungs
- More than 100 pounds of mercury, a potent neurotoxin that can cause learning disabilities in infants and young children

Blue Grass Energy member and Kentuckians For The Commonwealth spokesman Steve Wilkins, who also submitted air permit comments to DAQ in February, said he remains committed to promoting clean energy solutions in EKPC and its member co-ops. “Wind turbines and solar panels don’t release air pollution, and more efficient use of electricity can help utility members save money and EKPC avoid needing to build an expensive new power plant.”

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