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EPA to State: Pollution permit for coal-burning plant is deficient

Permit problems add to financial debacle to plague EKPC

WINCHESTER, Ky. – The Environmental Protection Agency has determined that a part of the air pollution permit issued by the state of Kentucky for a proposed coal-burning power plant in Clark County is inadequate. EPA’s determination that the state didn’t do a sufficient job in assessing the dangers of soot pollution from East Kentucky Power Cooperative’s proposed Smith plant comes on the heels of a scathing management audit that blasted EKPC’s competence and its decision to borrow nearly a billion dollars for the project.

“Auditors have told us that EKPC is on the brink of financial ruin, that current management isn’t capable of running the organization, and that pursuing the Smith plant is the highest risk option the co-op could undertake,” said Elizabeth Crowe, executive director of the Kentucky Environmental Foundation. “Now, EPA is opposing the air permit because the state underestimated the hazards of harmful soot emissions. It’s time for EKPC to stop wasting time and money on the Smith plant and start working on clean, affordable energy solutions.”

In a May 24 letter to the director of the Kentucky Department of Environmental Health, EPA said the state’s analysis of fine soot particles from the Smith plant is deficient. Fine soot particles from coal combustion, which contain a number of toxic chemicals, can penetrate deep into the lungs and cause significant damage, or even death. The Smith plant would emit an estimated 300 tons of soot annually.

“When it comes to our health, there is no such thing as a ‘safe’ level of pollution,” said Philip Curd, a Jackson County physician and customer of Jackson Energy Cooperative, an EKPC member. “The smaller soot particles are dangerous because they can lodge in the deepest recesses of lungs, where they can cause tissue damage and where cancers can originate.”

EPA actually warned the state about the inadequacies of its modeling on soot in a letter in March, but the Kentucky Division for Quality issued a final permit for the Smith plant anyway. Accurate models of how soot will disperse are necessary to ensure that the plant will comply with air quality protections and that soot emissions won’t harm public health.

“Clean energy resources such as efficiency, weatherization and renewable technologies, including hydroelectric generation at existing dams, are free of the many health risks associated

with burning coal,” said , chairman of the Sierra Club’s Cumberland Chapter Energy Committee. “Plus, there’s job creation and economic development benefits with clean energy that far surpass coal.”

EPA’s objections to the air permit only underscore the findings of the EKPC management audit released last month by the Kentucky Public Service Commission, which detailed systemic and disturbing financial problems at the cooperative.

“It’s foolhardy for the Smith plant to be moving forward under the shadow of such serious management concerns,” said Preston Miles of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. “The audit basically said the only way EKPC is ever going to get back on its feet financially is for someone to step in and revamp the cooperative’s entire business model. That needs to happen now before any more taxpayer and ratepayer money is wasted on a project as risky as the Smith coal plant.”

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www.kftc.org/stop-smith • www.kyenvironmentalfoundation.org/cleanair.html
www.sierraclub.org/coal/ky/