Burning coal costs us more than the monthly charge on our electricity bills.

Fossil fuel pollution takes a major toll on human and environmental health: 2.1 billion dollars in impacts — 94 from coal pollution. It’s time to do the math and add up how burning coal harms our health and our environment.

WHAT POLLUTION IS REALLY COSTING US

Minnesota utilities are required to factor pollution costs, using state estimates, into their energy plans. However, Minnesota has not updated its cost estimates, except for inflation, for close to 20 years. The state’s out-of-date numbers estimate the yearly statewide costs of fossil fuel pollution between $58 million and $257 million. These costs do not reflect current science that shows how pollution affects public health. In reality, fossil fuel power pollution costs Minnesotans more than $2.1 billion annually in health and environmental impacts, including emergency room visits and medical bills. Using out-of-date numbers mean that polluters don’t have to fully account for the harm their decision to pollute has on us.

WHAT’S BEING DONE ABOUT COSTLY POLLUTION

In October 2013, clean energy and environmental organizations petitioned the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the state agency that regulates utility companies, to update pollution costs based on new research on how pollution contributes to death and disease. The PUC is tasked with how to update the values used in utility energy plans that help determine the true costs of power pollution, including its toll on public health and the economy. In 2014, the PUC agreed to study these impacts.
Xcel Energy

**Xcel Energy’s coal pollution** — including soot, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxide — costs between $387.4 million and $1.4 billion each year. Xcel’s Sherco coal plant in Becker, Minn, emits 12,000 tons of nitrogen oxides (NOx) & 20,000 tons of sulfur dioxide (SO2) every year. Soot and smog pollution from coal plants contribute to significant health impacts, including asthma, lung cancer and other respiratory ailments. A study by the Clean Air Task Force study found that particle pollution from Sherco leads to an estimated 1600 asthma attacks, 150 heart attacks and 92 deaths each year.

Minnesota Power

**Minnesota Power**’s coal plant pollution—including soot, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxide—has real health and environment costs, between $145 million and $615.7 million each year. The utility which draws 80 percent of its power from burning coal, is accountable for 12,774 violations of the federal Clean Air Act at its Clay Boswell, Taconite Harbor, and Syl Laskin coal plants over the last five years, threatening public health. The Clean Air Task Force estimates that the Clay Boswell, Taconite Harbor and Syl Laskin coal plants contribute to a combined 367 asthma attacks, 36 heart attacks, and 23 premature deaths per year. The elderly, children and people with respiratory and heart disease are most at risk.

This means we are not only paying for our monthly electricity expenses, but we are also footing the bill for increased health care expenses, missed work and school, and environmental damages. Updating these cost values will force utilities to evaluate the true costs of burning dirty, outdated coal and would demonstrate how clean, renewable energy protects Minnesotans’ health and environment, unlike fossil fuels.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

Call on the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to update pollution cost values to reflect current science and outline a plan to account for the toll that burning coal takes on our health and the environment.

Submit your comment by visiting our petition at [http://sc.org/TrueCostsMN](http://sc.org/TrueCostsMN). We’ll deliver it to the PUC for you! You can also email your comment to jessica.tritsch@sierraclub.org or mail

Sierra Club c/o Jessica Tritsch,
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Personal stories are encouraged. Put “True Cost of Coal Pollution” in the subject line of your email or the top of your letter.

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