DYNEGY’S WOOD RIVER COAL PLANT: POLLUTING OUR COMMUNITY FOR DECADES

The Wood River power plant, located on the Berm Highway, has burned coal in the Alton community for more than 60 years. The plant sits near the Mississippi River, pulling nearly 350 million gallons of river water for its operations every day. This coal plant, operated by Texas-based power company Dynegy, Inc., contributes to dangerous levels of air and water pollution in Alton and the greater Metro East area.

The Wood River coal plant has a history of non-compliance with the United States Clean Water Act and violation of the United States Clean Air Act. These clean air and water protections are put into place to reduce pollution and safeguard the community’s health. By repeatedly violating these safeguards, Dynegy’s Wood River coal plant has put the wellbeing of the community at risk.

HOW DYNEGY’S WOOD RIVER PLANT IMPACTS PUBLIC HEALTH IN METRO EAST

Dynegy has already retired three coal-fired units of the power plant, but it’s time for rest of the plant to phase out burning coal as well.

Dynegy’s Wood River coal plant is a major polluter in Madison County, releasing thousands of tons of nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and particulate matter pollution every year. According to the Respiratory Health Association, major concerns for human health from exposure to particulate matter from coal pollution include effects on breathing and respiratory systems, damage to lung tissue, cancer and premature death.
After the coal is burned, the leftover coal ash waste is dumped into ponds surrounding the plant. The largest of the ponds is called the East Ash Pond System, which is 39 acres and violates local water standards with exceedances of sulfate, chloride, manganese, iron and more. The pond also discharges into the Wood River Creek and is one of two ponds in Illinois ranked as high hazard by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This level of hazard means that if the pond fails, the cost could be loss of human life.

According to Physicians for Social Responsibility, coal pollution can “damage the respiratory, cardiovascular, and nervous systems and contributes to four of the top five leading causes of death in the U.S.” In 2012, the Clean Air Task Force estimated that Dynegy’s Wood River coal plant contributes to 22 premature deaths per year.

**TEXAS-BASED DYNEGY PUTS PROFITS OVER COMMUNITY HEALTH**

Dynegy, which operates the Wood River coal-fired power plant along with nine other coal-fired power plants in the state of Illinois, has a history of bankruptcy and mismanagement in its operations in communities across the nation.

Right here in Illinois, Dynegy is already in hot water for its dangerous coal ash waste pits. In the company’s quarterly report to the U.S. Securities Exchange Commission in summer 2013, Dynegy explained that it has been doing “hydrogeologic” investigations at the Vermilion coal plant site, and results have shown that the coal ash pits are affecting groundwater in the area.¹

**MOVING FORWARD IN METRO EAST**

As the state of Illinois and the nation as a whole transitions away from coal, now is the time to come together to clean up our air and water while making our city a hub for new development and family-sustaining jobs.

The community deserves cleaner air and water and a safer place to live and raise children. Dynegy must be up-front with the community and establish a clear plan moving forward for the Wood River coal plant that includes a reasonable phase-out date, ensures a responsible transition for the workers, and a plan to remediate the site.

Dynegy’s Wood River coal plant has been harming the health of local residents since 1954. It’s time to forge a new path forward for Alton. It’s time to move beyond coal pollution to a clean energy economy.

To learn more about how to protect public health and boost our clean energy economy in Alton, please contact Elizabeth Scrafford at 208-818-4626 or Elizabeth.Scrafford@sierraclub.org

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**ENDNOTES**