Duke Energy: Pollute to Profit

- Duke makes money by exaggerating future energy demand, gaming the regulatory system, building unnecessary gas pipelines and power plants, then charging customers for costly, unneeded infrastructure.

- Duke claims to provide affordable, safe, and clean energy. Its accidents and environmental disasters suggests otherwise.

Executive Summary


Currently, less than 6% of Duke’s electric production capacity is renewable wind and solar energy. Duke spends its money on public relations and political campaigns designed to block pro-solar energy legislation from ever seeing the light of day. Duke was also in the top five of all corporate donors in all but one election cycle in North Carolina from 2000-2016.

The flipside of Duke’s opposition to solar is that it invests heavily in dangerous, unnecessary fossil fuel infrastructure. From 1998-2017, gas and hazardous liquid (including oil) pipeline incidents across the country caused 1,292 injuries and killed 331 people in total. In recent years, from 2010 to 2016, there was an average of 1.5 to 2 pipeline...
incidents per day, including 208 explosions; these pipeline incidents cost over $550 million per year on average. Duke’s gas infrastructure is no exception to these alarming statistics. Injuries and thousands of gallons of spilled oil in Ohio serve as a tragic reminder of the price of Duke’s fossil fuel addiction.

Duke builds harmful gas plants and pipelines to make money, not to meet legitimate energy needs. Duke takes advantage of outdated regulatory systems that guarantee a 14% return on investment to build gas pipelines, even though Duke-owned renewables and efficiency programs also guarantee a return on investment. When Duke builds this unnecessary infrastructure, ratepayers are then on the hook for the costs.

The impact of Duke’s dirty development is staggering. Since 2000, Duke has racked up the fifth-highest amount of environmental penalties out of all companies in the United States (by total paid). Duke also has the unique dishonor of paying the largest federal criminal fine in North Carolina history — $102 million — for releasing coal ash into the Dan River in 2014. These fines offer little solace for residents near the Duke coal ash sites who have not had access to drinkable water in their homes for nearly three years and who Duke attempted to charge for the replacement water these homes required for basic living.

It seems that for Duke Energy, the fines are just the cost of running a business that endangers communities across its business territory.

Endnotes