

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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Groups File Lawsuit Against Duke Energy Power Plant in Hamlet, NC

Today at a press conference in Raleigh, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and the Concerned Citizens of Richmond County released their legal challenge to the state air permit for Duke Energy's combustion turbine electric power plant in Hamlet. The groups charged the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources with failure to regulate the powerful utility and protect public health.

The lawsuit was filed today with the US Environmental Protection Agency and cites several violations of the federal Clean Air Act. The petition states, "In sum, the Permit allows excessive emissions of air pollutants which are having a negative impact on public health and allows an ongoing environmental injustice. We call upon the EPA to object to this permit."

Lou Zeller, Executive Director of the League and author of the complaint, outlined a litany of objections to the air permit issued by North Carolina in July, including excessive emissions of formaldehyde and benzene, side-stepping of pollution controls and environmental injustice. He said, "The State of North Carolina continues to be in thrall of the largest investor-owned utility on the planet." Reflecting on the company's shift from diesel fuel to natural gas at the Richmond plant, Zeller concluded, "The shift to natural gas is not helping at all. In fact, during the last four years the overall level of pollution has nearly tripled." From 2008 to 2012, actual emissions of pollutants

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increased by 115% for nitrogen oxides, 145% for sulfur dioxide, and 146% for formaldehyde.

Cary Rodgers, the League's Environmental Justice Organizer, said that people living near the plant are suffering from high levels of noise, odor and smoke. "Long-time residents tell us they are awakened at three o'clock in the morning by loud noises from Duke's power plant. And the air around their homes is filled with bitter tasting smoke." Rodgers held up photos taken by residents showing huge grey pollution clouds. He added, "We are demanding that the EPA offset the disproportionate impact of pollution on this community. EPA must mandate a corresponding level of resources and technology to correct the ongoing environmental injustice in Hamlet."

Residents from Hamlet at the press conference spoke about the ill effects of living near the power plant. The EPA will now have 60 days to respond to the groups' petition.

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is a thirty year old statewide organization with chapters across the state. The Concerned Citizens of Richmond County is a League chapter organized early this year by residents of Hamlet.

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