

PROPOSED Op Ed

Rethinking Coal Power

If your electricity comes from PSE, it may surprise you to learn that one-third of your supply comes from coal power. And most of that coal power is generated by a single outdated, out-of-state coal plant in Colstrip, Montana. The Colstrip plant is one of our region's largest greenhouse gas polluters and its leaking toxic ash ponds (a byproduct of coal burning) threaten the health of our Montana neighbors.

What does that mean for you? It means your cell phone, laptop, television and refrigerator are powered with highly polluting coal. If you drive an electric vehicle, it means coal is powering part of your investment: your carbon footprint is higher than you think. And it means that our green Northwest is contributing much more to climate change than we think.

The time's ripe for a change. The EPA recently released its clean power proposal, which would address carbon pollution from coal power plants across the nation such as Colstrip. Washington state is also at an energy crossroads: this spring, Governor Inslee unveiled a climate action plan for our state, and transitioning away from coal power is a top priority. In his executive order, the governor specifically identifies out-of-state coal power as an area that needs immediate attention, and he's invited PSE to serve on the state's Carbon Emissions Reduction Taskforce.

Western Washington cities are fortunate to have PSE as a trusted partner and utility provider. An accomplished nationwide leader in wind energy, PSE has earned our respect for its support of energy conservation and clean, renewable energy technology. In this spirit of appreciation, we write now to encourage PSE to take the natural next step towards a better energy future for our communities. As they have in the past, PSE can continue leading the way on clean energy and climate change mitigation by re-thinking its current reliance on coal power.

Economic conditions necessitate a quick move. The national and state-level efforts to curb carbon pollution mean that coal plants are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain and operate, to say nothing of repairing Colstrip's dirty, dangerous and outdated system. In fact, the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission has questioned PSE's continued investments in Colstrip. The commissioners have recommended that PSE begin a special process to reexamine its future commitment to coal power.

We urge PSE to take action and start planning today for a post-coal future. In doing so, PSE can capitalize on opportunities for continued innovation in state-generated clean power. Renewable energy is an expanding field, creating Northwest jobs for the 21st century. Already, the state Department of Ecology has documented more than 47,000 jobs in Washington's green energy sector. Thousands more career wage family jobs will come from the transition away from dirty coal to clean solar, wind, and energy efficiency. Our future lies in this direction.

The bottom line is that we don't need coal. The potential is there for Washington to meet its energy needs with efficiency programs, wind, solar and other technologies. We just need to rise to the occasion.

As public officials, we not only have accountability to our communities today, but also to our children's children who will inherit this world tomorrow. Our families need clean air, clean water and a stable climate. We cannot sacrifice these basic human rights to keep a dying industry on

life support.

As we see it, moving away from coal and investing in better energy alternatives will in the long run create new jobs, promote innovation, reduce electricity bills and protect the health of our families. PSE is a forward-thinking company, and we ask that it continue along this path. We respectfully urge PSE to re-think its investment in coal. A coal-free PSE would be better for the people of Bellingham, Olympia and Mercer Island, and for the rest of our communities.