

## Groups oppose coal-fired plant

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The Southern Environmental Law Center has filed a letter of concern with the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control regarding a proposed \$984 million power generation plant to be built along the Great Pee Dee River near Kingsburg.

Of concern is a pending draft air quality permit by DHEC that would be applied to the operation of two 660-megawatt pulverized coal-fired boilers. Environmental officials said the construction of those boilers ultimately would contribute to a significant degradation of South Carolina's air quality.

The plant will be built on a portion of 2,700 acres that Santee Cooper bought in 1982 adjacent to the Great Pee Dee River off Old River Road (State Secondary Road 57). Construction is expected to begin this year and is expected to create as many as 1,400 construction jobs during seven years.

When the plant is fully operational in January 2014, Santee Cooper officials said, it will employ about 100 people with an average salary of \$50,000 a year.

Nancy Cave, North Coast director of the Coastal Conservation League in Georgetown, said her group is adamantly opposed to Santee Cooper's construction of these units, as well as the DHEC permit that would help allow the project to proceed.

"We feel that the federal Clean Air Act really demands that DHEC force Santee Cooper to look at the best and cleanest technology," she said. "A pulverized coal plant of this magnitude is detrimental to South Carolina and its citizens."

Santee Cooper is a state-owned electric and water utility that generates the power sold to the 20 electric cooperatives throughout South Carolina.

Santee Cooper officials could not be reached for comment about the letter of concern by press time Tuesday.

The letter sent to DHEC commended its Bureau of Air Quality for its overall efforts to improve air quality in South Carolina. But DHEC must be more aggressive in assessing the need for Santee Cooper's construction of these facilities, the report said.

DHEC had no official response to the letter. DHEC spokesman Thom Berry, however, said a series of public meetings to gather input about the project will be held sometime during the next several weeks. These likely will take place somewhere in or near Pamplico, close to the site of the proposed facilities.

"The permit application is still under review," Berry said. "We're hoping to be able to be in a position where we can go out on a public notice within the next six to eight weeks to take public comments."

There will be a 30-day public comment period once the public notice period is established, Berry said.

Cave said such coal-fired units represent an outdated energy production approach that can be remedied by the incorporation of coal-gasification technology, which reduces the degree of carbon emissions.

Even if the Bureau of Air Quality ultimately determines the need for these units, DHEC still should deny Santee Cooper's permit application because the company doesn't take advantage of the best available control technology, Cave said.

"What needs to be looked at is a statewide energy policy that includes conservation and the use of alternative fuels," she said. "This state is way behind in energy efficiency. We need to go a long way before we start permitting coal plants.

"This is to go on public record that we are opposed and DHEC needs to demand a great deal more analysis from Santee Cooper," she said. "I don't expect any huge change, but at least we are on record in opposition and beginning a dialogue for alternative recommendations."

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