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Santee Cooper defends coal-burning plant

The Associated Press

Santee Cooper's president and chief executive told a crowd of hundreds at a public meeting that the utility wants to make sure a coal-burning power plant it is trying to build in Florence County will provide affordable power while being environmentally responsible.

Lonnie Carter also said at the meeting Thursday night in Hannah-Pamplico High School's gymnasium that he expects the power plant to be built despite heavy opposition from environmental groups.

The purpose of the meeting was to let the state Department of Health and Environmental Control collect public comment on whether a final permit should be issued to build the \$1 billion, 600-megawatt plant along the Pee Dee River. A draft permit has already been issued for the plant, which Santee Cooper officials hope to have running around 2012.

One of the people opposing the permits wanted to know why DHEC doesn't wait to issue a final permit until an environmental impact study on the plant is finished.

"We think it is unconscionable for DHEC to already approve a draft air permit for this plant," said Mike King, who was representing the Pee Dee River Watchers.

King said the plant would add mercury to the Pee Dee River, where advisories have already been issued about the mercury content of fish in the river.

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