

Thursday, March 10, 2011 9:30-11:30
Children's Environmental Health Working Group
Collaborative on Health and the Environment - WA (CHE-WA)

In attendance: Gail Gensler, Julia Berg, Margo Young, Cara Dolan, Cherie Eichholz, Jeanne Johnson, Nicole Thomsen

Introductions including request from Nicole obtaining CHE-WA's support for funding proposal she is putting together. Nicole already has been in communication with Steve Gilbert re this. In general, attendees at this meeting were supportive but would like more information. Nicole will send out more information and follow up with group.

- I. WSEHA partnerships (Gail Gensler):
- II. Outreach to health care providers (Gail Gensler): This group met and had a good meeting but is unsure what direction to pursue.

Break

- III. Coal report from Cara Dolan: Since last summer Cara Dolan has been working as the Public Health Organizer for Earth Justice via the Sierra Club, on the Coal Free Washington campaign. The focus of the campaign is to set a timetable for closure of Washington State's sole coal plant (TransAlta), located in Centralia. Closure of this plant, along with closure of Oregon's only plant in Boardman, would make the NW coal (power) free.

From: http://www.my-cause.com/cause/wa_health_professionals_support_coal_free_wa

The sole remaining coal plant in Washington is the TransAlta coal plant, located in Centralia. Coal is a dirty and dangerous source of energy. TransAlta is the largest single point source of carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury pollution in Washington.

Coal pollution is extremely hazardous to our health. It has been linked to four of the five major causes of death in our nation, including cancer, stroke, heart disease and chronic lower respiratory diseases.

As Washington's largest source of mercury air pollution, TransAlta emits 354 pounds of mercury annually. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that may result in irritability, tremors, changes in vision or hearing, memory problems, depression, drowsiness, developmental delay, mental retardation, and permanent loss of intelligence. Exposure to high levels of mercury can permanently damage the brain, kidneys, and developing fetus.

TransAlta also releases arsenic and lead. Arsenic is a known human carcinogen. Exposure to lead can decrease IQ and can cause nervous system, behavioral and developmental problems.

The National Research Council's report, Hidden Costs of Energy: Unpriced Consequences of Energy Production and Use, estimates that the annual health care costs of TransAlta to be 11.2 million dollars.

Legislation was put forth in January in Olympia that aimed to close TransAlta by 2015, 10 years earlier than called for under an executive order signed by Gov. Chris Gregoire. However, despite Gregoire's having signed an executive order, no plan was put in place to transition the state from coal power; this bill aims to do so.

An agreement was reached in early March between stakeholders. For text of press release see:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/coal/wa/downloads/Historicagreementreached.pdf>

Key points include (from Governor Gregoire's statement):

~TransAlta will be allowed in the interim to sell coal power under long-term contracts within Washington – which will give the company the financial stability needed to transition to a cleaner source of energy;

~The plant's two coal boilers will meet the state's emissions performance standard for new and modified power plants, which will require the boilers to shut down. The standard will apply to one boiler on Dec. 31, 2020, and to the other boiler on Dec. 31, 2025 – essentially ending coal-fired power in Washington state in the next 14 years;

~In 2013, TransAlta will install additional air pollution control technology to further reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides at the plant. This technology is called selective non-catalytic reduction (SNCR). The TransAlta plant is the state's largest single industrial source of nitrogen oxide emissions. Nitrogen oxides are one of the causes of visibility-limiting regional haze in national parks and on federal lands; and

~TransAlta agrees to contribute \$30 million in a community investment fund to help with energy efficiency projects, as well as \$25 million in an energy technology transition fund, which must be spent on supporting innovative energy technologies and companies in Washington state.

More information re coal can be found at:

1. <http://www.sierraclub.org/coal/wa/Hf5r6Y2D.html>
2. <http://www.psr.org/resources/coals-assault-on-human-health.html>
3. http://www.lungusa.org/healthy-air/outdoor/resources/toxic-air-report/?utm_source=ToxicAir&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=HazardousAirPollution
4. <http://www.sierraclub.org/coal/downloads/0508-coal-report-fact-sheet.pdf>

Next CHE-WA meeting: 4/14/2011 - April's meeting host will be Heather Trim from People for Puget Sound. Location = at the LHWMP office.