

Commissioners Approve Coal Export Facility in Washington State

Local News

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Kelso, WA — The Cowlitz County Commission put its rubber stamp on a plan today that allows an Australia-based company to establish a coal export terminal in Longview, WA.

The commissioners, by a 3-0 vote, granted a permit to allow the coal exporting facility on waterfront land in Longview without a full analysis of its potentially significant effects on people and the environment. Approval of the permit was given despite a lack of fundamental scientific information.

“As a local businessman I am disappointed by the commissioners' decision today,” said Stanley Florek, Chief Executive Officer of Tangerine Power. “I want to see Cowlitz County creating manufacturing jobs for 21st century industries, like clean energy, not exporting dirty resources. Tying up our waterfront properties to ship coal to China is a step in the wrong direction, for our economy and our environment.”

Energy companies would use the terminal to send millions of tons of coal from Montana and Wyoming through the Columbia Gorge by train, then load it into ships bound for China. Australia-based Ambre Energy would annually export five million tons of coal from a Longview port.

Local community groups, conservation organizations and citizens voiced their disagreement with the commission's decision. At the hearing last Tuesday, the Commission heard a chorus of opposition over the proposed massive coal export terminal. Out of the 28 individuals testifying, 26 were against the project.

Today, health experts and members of the faith community reiterated their concerns about the impact of the coal export facility.

“Exporting coal out of Longview poses a triple threat to our public health,” said Dr. Dale A. Bowen of Ariel, WA. “Coal dust has been linked to respiratory diseases. Mercury, released during coal combustion, is a potent neurotoxin. Coal's contribution to global warming is substantial and puts our health at stake. Here in Washington, climate change means an increased spread of infectious diseases, potential scarcity of water for agriculture and drinking, and dangerous heat strokes. We urge the county commission and Governor Gregoire to protect public health and say no to coal in Washington."

"We are deeply upset with the commissioners' decision as this is a vote against human health,” said Cherie Eichholz, Executive Director of Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility. “The impacts of coal are well known and dangerous. Coal combustion releases mercury, and dozens of other substances known to be hazardous to the respiratory, cardiovascular and nervous systems. Moreover, the health implications of global warming are exponentially devastating. To protect our communities we must transition away from this dirty fossil fuel."

"My faith tells me that there is a better way to improve the lives of the children in my community than by selling their lungs to China on behalf of a foreign company," said Mary Lyons of Longview, who is a member of Saint Stephen's Church and Earth Ministry. "My Creator tells me to speak up for a better solution, one that helps all people rather than a project that benefits the very few, while destroying many others. The beautiful Columbia River is the finest asset of my region. Both the local and distant pollution caused by a coal export terminal are too important to my heart and to my faith to allow me to walk away silently."

Conservation groups criticized the decision, saying the proposal runs counter to the Northwest's longtime goals for cleaner energy, and hasn't had a thorough environmental analysis.

"The nation's eyes are upon us. It's time for Governor Gregoire to step in and decide whether Washington becomes a leader for a clean energy future or a gateway for dirty coal to China," said Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director of Columbia Riverkeeper.

"This is not our future. Our economic and environmental destiny is not to become a resource colony for Asian economies and an enabler for the reckless fossil fuel addiction that is destroying our kids' only planet," said K.C. Golden, Policy Director of Climate Solutions. "Our future is to become a leader in the transition to a clean energy economy, and to reap the local economic and health rewards of that leadership. We can do better, and we will."