Repower Port Augusta

10 Alexander St,
Port Augusta
SA 5700

Submission for Senate community Affairs Committee
Inquiry into the Impacts of Air Quality on Health

Background

Port Augusta has had a power station in their community [2km south of the city], since Thomas Playford built the first Power Station.

The core group of the Repower Port Augusta Group was established in February 2012, after a local Community Information Session on CST. [Concentrated Solar Tower].

We are able to state we have a National Alliance behind us, including Beyond Zero and 100% renewable, Australian Youth Climate Coalition [AYCC], Clean SA, and the conservation council of SA. They are supporting us by collecting online petitions, face to face conversations in their community and, lobbying Canberra to build a Solar Plant in Port Augusta. They have formed a group called Repower Port Augusta Alliance.

Last July, [2012], we held a community vote to decide whether a Solar or Gas Power Station to be built in Port Augusta. The community vote was overwhelming, for a Solar Thermal power station to be the next power generating station. Over a quarter of Port Augusta voted, amounting to 4000 plus votes.

Although Repower Port Augusta has not sought information from Alinta about particulates and health we are aware of the DEA report.

We have the full support of the Port Augusta City Council, Business Port Augusta.

Why are we concerned?

Coal in Leigh Creek is becoming expensive and difficult to extract and the Power Station, owned by Alinta at Port Augusta, will require a source of energy to continue to operate as a Power Station into the future. Port Augusta supplies over 40% of SA power.

We are concerned that the future of the power generation will continue down the old, worn path of coal resulting in air pollution, with the subsequent disease processes experienced by our community. Future power generating capacity must be renewable, clean and be found from sustainable resources.

The economic cost of fine particle pollution in USA, from living near a coal fired power station exceeds five billion dollars each year. Although Port Augusta is not as large as towns in USA, the message from data presented by the Doctors for the

Environment, and worldwide studies are clear. Coal fired stations; especially the particulates expelled, cost the environment and health billions.[1]

The effects from living in a community where a coal fired power station is close by are:

- premature death in people with heart and lung disease
- thousands of heart attacks each year
- worsening of respiratory symptoms: coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and triggering asthma attacks
- excess hospital admissions, emergency room visits and clinic visits for respiratory diseases and cardiovascular diseases
- lung function abnormalities, especially in children and people with lung diseases such as asthma;
- abnormal changes in heart rate variability and irregular heartbeat
- the development of chronic respiratory disease in children.

Stated in the Drs for Environment Australia Report "It is for these reasons that DEA continues to seek to support the introduction of renewable generation technologies for electricity within the Australian communities to protect the health of individuals, communities and reduce the public health burden of yesterday's polluting technology.'' Data supplied by EPA South Australia for the period 2005-2011. [2]

A study, conducted by an Environmental Agency in the USA, found communities living near Coal-fired power plants, had cardiopulmonary and lung cancer deaths conservatively in the thousands. [3] Port Augusta has twice the average lung cancer rate. 'this event" is explained by the large population who smoke.[4]

Ask any community member in Port Augusta and they could name a large number of people whom have died from cancers, never smoked and were generally fit and well. The daily cleaning ritual of windowsills and furniture, due to the black sootlike particles, is also a favourite topic. Mothers and children, living at home, not workers from the power station are also affected by the environment.

The power station was turned off for several months and anectodal evidence from my community was the lack of dust in the air, and how windows could be left open at night. Long term residents state they could tell when the precipatators were turned off at night, due to the particulates over the car and windows.

[1] DEA Particle Assessment Report Port Augusta 2012 www.dea.org.au

[2] DEA Particle Assessment Report Port Augusta 2012 www.dea.org.au

[3] This report was written by John Balbus, MD, MPH, the Chief Health Scientist at Environmental Defense Fund, Sarah Penney and Jacob Bell. Environmental Defense Fund, 1875 Connecticut Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20009 202-387-3500 © 2009 Environmental Defense Fund

[4] DEA Particle Assessment Report Port Augusta 2012 www.dea.org.au

10 Alexander St,
Port Augusta
SA 5700

Add this fact to the uncertain fuel prices that impact on every day living activity, and then we are bound to see an increase in mental health illnesses as our community copes with uncertain financial future related to living next to the coal powered station and cancer risk, drought conditions from climate change and lack of employment opportunities.

The cost to the community in loss of independence from illness and the associated mental health costs, loss of wages and volunteering duties; reliance on public housing, health and emergency services; as well as transport are incalculable to the person whom is trapped in a short of breath illness cycle.

The reality for most Port Augustans whom live in low socio-economic environments is choosing between electricity use, medication and food. During my discussions with Probus, Lions and other social clubs in Port Augusta, when voicing this statement, many community members agree this is a frequent decision. One families electricity bill was over 3 thousand dollars due to their sick baby requiring cardiac surgery and needing to be kept in a stable cool environment.

Recommendations

1. To work with the Doctors for the Environment to ensure the best health outcomes for the community and region of Port Augusta and other coal mining communities.
2. To work with other state, federal agencies to expedite Concentrated Solar Thermal Power Generation in South Australia, Port Augusta.
3. The Commonwealth Government reassesses funding priorities, and support clean, sustainable, renewable energy instead of old coal powered stations.
4. Work with the WHO [World Health Organisation] to ensure the new guidelines are equal to or better than the recommendations of WHO.
5. Work within WHO health statement: A priority for countries is to secure infrastructure without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. [Nairobi call for action 2009]

Attachments:
DEA Particle Assessment Report Port Augusta 2012 www.dea.org.au