

Clean Power Coalition: Local doctors warn about consequences of coal

Posted on Thursday, Mar 22, 2018

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

CONTACT: Dana LaFontsee
262.888.0231
dana.lafontsee@outlook.com

Oak Creek, WI – The Clean Power Coalition of Southeast Wisconsin hosted a coal and health community discussion Wednesday evening featuring local doctors, impacted residents, and other concerned citizens with an attendance of over 120 people. Earlier this month, test results confirmed that black dust found covering homes, cars, and yards in several Oak Creek neighborhoods was coal dust from We Energies' nearby power plants. Coal contains toxic metals including lead, mercury, and arsenic.

“Short term and long term inhalation of coal dust, particularly fine coal dust, can cause chronic respiratory issues and increase the likelihood of asthma exacerbation,” said Dr. Michael Ganz, a local asthma and allergy specialist. “I’ve seen a number of people who lived in close proximity to the Oak Creek Power Plants who had an increased incidence of chronic respiratory illness.”

Following the community discussion, local residents and utility customers are demanding that We Energies attend a public listening session in two weeks time to hear directly from those who are impacted. The Public Listening Session is scheduled for April 4 from 6 to 7:30 at the Oak Creek Library.

“My family has a long history in this area, over 150 years. We’ve lived with pollution from the power plants since the 1950’s,” said Frank Michna, a resident who lives just south of the coal plants. “At first, we didn’t realize what the health hazards were. Now that we’re older, we realize how serious it is. We think enough is enough

and we want it cleaned up!”

“Young children are particularly susceptible to toxins from particulate matter like coal dust because their lungs are still developing. They also spend more time outdoors than adults and breathe much faster, taking in 50% more air for their body weight than adults,” said Dr. Ann Behrmann, a recently retired pediatrician who is an advocate with the Wisconsin Environmental Health Network. “Coal dust and ash also contain heavy metals like lead and mercury, which can permanently damage a developing brain even at levels pediatricians once thought were safe. Besides increasing asthma rates in kids, when a pregnant mother is exposed to particulate matter it increases her risk of having a low birth weight or premature baby,” she explained.

“Not only for the health of families should we transition from coal, but for the health of our neighborhoods. Fossil fuels aren’t sustainable for the planet, the long-term economic viability of our communities, or our health,” said Kelly Nichols, Midwest Organizer for Moms Clean Air Force, “A just transition to clean energy is what a people deserve.”