

Clean Power Coalition: As We Energies faces water permit decision, toxic bluff collapse still haunts neighbors

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OAK CREEK, WI — [The Clean Power Coalition of Southeast Wisconsin hosted an online press conference Thursday](#) morning on the ninth anniversary of the We Energies' Oak Creek bluff collapse incident which occurred on Halloween of 2011. Speakers from the community and local public officials called on We Energies to stop their dirty tricks and finally end their haunting legacy in Southeast Wisconsin by retiring their polluting and devastation-prone coal plant. We Energies is faced with having to eliminate its more dangerous methods for handling coal ash by the end of next year, in accordance with its water permit. The company has yet to decide whether it will invest more money in the Oak Creek coal plant, or shut it down in order to comply. Speakers appealed to the company to make the only decision that will offer residents a guaranteed future free of impacts from that plant: a retirement and remediation timeline for the coal-fired Oak Creek Power Plant.

“When the bluff collapsed, it was for the most part, out of sight from the public. But it didn’t go entirely unnoticed, and being out of sight doesn’t protect neighbors from the toxic impacts,” **S. Janet Weyker, Racine Dominicans, co-founder of the Eco-Justice Center and a Caledonia resident and neighbor to the Oak Creek coal plant** recalled. “The damage being done to the environment and human health by burning coal can’t be hidden from everyone’s view. The public has been tricked enough! We want to be treated to clean renewable energy,” she added.

[The event was streamed on Facebook Live and a full recording is available](#)

[to watch here.](#)

Rev. Dana Kelley, assistant pastor of the Reviving Faith Movement and Lead Organizer of North Side Rising in Milwaukee, shared her original poem entitled, "[Deadly PMs](#)," including the following excerpt:

*"Who can rescue us?" many have asked
We Energies has promised to take on the task
But what have they done from day to day
Burn more Coal while making poor people pay
\$75million dollars going to waste
While Particle Matter wipes out the Human Race*

Rev. Kelley's poem references a figure from analysis included in WEC Energy Group's (We Energies' parent company) rate case last year which shows that the Oak Creek Power Plant costs customers \$75 million per year more than if the utility had just purchased energy from the open market.

Kirsten Shead, Co-Executive Director of Milwaukee Water Commons, said "We need to align ourselves with the people that are being most impacted by the effects of burning fossil fuels and climate change - the most vulnerable and the most marginalized communities among us. In Milwaukee, that's our Black and Brown communities. Lake Michigan needs us to stop burning fossil fuels and emitting pollutants, and our people who are being impacted by asthma and flooding and particulate matter need us to stand boldly and demand renewable energy."

Milwaukee County Supervisor Steven Shea spoke about the local community's concerns about mercury levels in Lake Michigan. "The biggest polluter in the Lake Michigan watershed is We Energies. Their coal-burning plant in Oak Creek is polluting our air and water. Coal is the energy source of the 19th century. We don't need it in the 21st century."

Wisconsin State Senator Chris Larson added, "The failure of We Energies to come up with a plan to retire their coal plant is emblematic of the Trump Administrations' anti-science, polluter-friendly agenda. While Governor Evers stands ready to lead with innovative solutions to our energy needs, climate deniers fight tooth and nail for the status quo. This backward-thinking approach is killing our planet and endangering our children's future. There's nothing scarier than dirty air and not doing our part to address climate change."

Tom Rutkowski, Co-Chair of the Sierra Club Southeast Gateway Group and a founding member of the Clean Power Coalition of Southeast

Wisconsin stated, “Just months ago, Gale Klappa, the WEC Energy Group executive chairman, acknowledged that older, less efficient plants in their fleet would be looked at if their retirement would improve the environment. Those statements lack any kind of urgency or responsibility to residents. We deserve a definite date for plant closure, not mere speculation.”