

Higgins, Joni (UTC)

From: Kouchi, Roger (UTC) on behalf of Public Involvement (UTC)
Sent: Friday, October 11, 2013 8:02 AM
To: UTC DL Records Center
Subject: FW: Puget Sound Energy Integrated Resource Plan (UE-120767)

From: Charles Law [mailto:mattp@re-sources.org]
Sent: Thursday, October 10, 2013 3:59 PM
To: Public Involvement (UTC)
Subject: Puget Sound Energy Integrated Resource Plan (UE-120767)

Dear Chairman Danner, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission: As a customer of PSE, I believe that it's important to include the the people in Colstrip, Montana who can't drink the water from their wells because it's contaminated with byproducts of coal ash. Four major power plants operate nearby, and are notorious for violating regulations with little oversight from the state's environmental authority. Residents have tried to get local and state regulatory agencies to act, to no avail. PP&L, the company that operates the power plants, has already settled one lawsuit and paid \$25 million to the affected plaintiffs, but continues to ignore regulations that would have it clean up and improve the seal on its coal ash ponds. Those ponds have been flawed from the start: when the lining was first put in, the company that installed it refused to guarantee its product, saying it would not be effective given site-specific needs. The power utility refused the company's recommendations and went ahead with the inadequate lining anyway, assuming responsibility for what the lining company would not. Parties to the \$25 million settlement are prohibited from suing PP&L again or even speaking publicly on the issue, including with people now facing the same problem who are looking to take action. The way one Colstrip rancher described the situation to me, PP&L is working to keep the issue as quiet as possible and will do anything to prevent publicity around the environmental hazards that Colstrip residents are facing - rather than spend the money to fix the source of the problem. Rumor has it in Colstrip that a PP&L coal-fired plant in Billings is dumping its waste directly into the Yellowstone River - legally, because of "a permit through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality," according to one source. And the issue isn't just about the environmental damage; it's about the health risks associated with coal ash contaminants, which include arsenic and mercury, and it's about access to public water supplies. Today, if a household finds its well contaminated, it can go through the legal system and have a new well drilled, but it then loses the water right that came with the land. In Montana, water rights govern how residents are permitted to access public water supplies. With this story, I'd illustrate the hardships endured by the people of Colstrip, the environmental and health risks they face, and the legal battles they have tried to pursue, with no help from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. One rancher made a comment to me recently on the irony of history, describing how he feels tied to the land because his family has been there for generations, but that his family fought Native Americans to settle the land, and now, he said, "I understand what they were fighting for." Colstrip is not alone in the struggle to confront the coal industry on how it manages its waste, but it is one strong example of the extreme consequences of environmental neglect that are being seen across the country. PSE is part owner of Colstrip and is therefore as responsible as PP&L. The trustees of our church in Bellingham have divested our holdings in PP&L and Colstrip operation. What will it take for PSE to do the same? Thank you,

Charles Law

1519 Valhalla St
Bellingham, Washington