



Appalachian  
Voices



CHESAPEAKE  
CLIMATE  
ACTION  
NETWORK



Southern Appalachian  
Mountain Stewards  
[www.samsstg.org](http://www.samsstg.org)



Southern  
Environmental  
Law Center



SIERRA  
CLUB  
FOUNDED 1892

July 11, 2012

To Members of the Virginia General Assembly:

You may have recently received an invitation from Dominion Virginia Power to tour the company's new "clean coal" and biomass power plant in Wise County. While Dominion's goal was to show you the benefits of the coal plant, we're writing to ensure that you have both sides of the story. **We wish to point out the true cost of our reliance on coal for public health and the environment by inviting you to tour areas in Virginia that have been adversely impacted by coal energy.**

Dominion's Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center, which it plans to bring online within the next month, will release 94% less toxic mercury than was originally proposed in draft permits and 82% less sulfur dioxide. In fact, the mercury emissions limit for the plant, which was made more protective of public health following efforts by our coalition, meets the EPA's new standard for mercury emissions. However, the fact that there is less pollution coming out of the facility's smokestacks by no means makes coal a "clean" source of energy.

**The impacts of so-called "clean coal" on Virginians include:**

- Destruction of Communities, Mountains & Ecosystems in Appalachia
  - While the plant will obtain some of its fuel from existing waste coal piles, much of the coal used in Virginia comes from mountains that have fallen victim to mountaintop removal. To date, 67 Virginia mountaintops or ridges and the ecosystems they held have been forever lost to mountaintop removal coal mining. As of the EPA's last assessment in 2001, 151 linear miles of streams have been buried under mining waste in Virginia alone.
- Health Impacts
  - Mountaintop removal coal mining has been linked to higher infant mortality and people living near the destruction are 50% more likely to die of cancer and 42% more likely to be born with birth defects compared with other people in Appalachia. This video (<http://bit.ly/WiseMTRVid>) tells the story of one Virginian affected by mountaintop removal coal mining. A recent investigation (<http://bit.ly/BlackLung>) by the Center for Public Integrity and National Public Radio found that incidence of black lung among coal miners has doubled in the last decade.
  - Even meeting current US EPA pollution emission standards, coal-fired power plants still have a serious impact on our health. Virginia's coal-fired power plants cause 5,000 asthma attacks, 647 premature deaths, 477 hospital admissions, and 896 heart attacks per year. Today, Virginia ranks 6th in the nation for health impacts from coal plants.
- Climate Change
  - While the facility has pollution control equipment to lower emissions of mercury, soot, and smog-forming pollutants, it does not include any technology to control carbon dioxide and other gases that lead to climate

change. Further, while the plant is designed to burn up to 20% biomass, a fuel considered renewable in Virginia, recent scientific evidence shows that burning wood will not help to solve the climate change crisis. The latest analyses, including a recent study (<http://bit.ly/SEbiomass>) that focused specifically on the Southeast, have found that in the long run, burning wood instead of fossil fuels to make electricity can reduce heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, but not soon enough to prevent worsening the conditions leading to global climate change.

- Residents of coastal areas of Virginia are already feeling the effects of sea level rise. In the neighborhoods that are most affected, many residents have had their basements flood five times in the last five years. This recent PBS story (<http://bit.ly/NorfolkSeaLevel>) features a few of them.
- Climate change leads to more severe and costly weather events. While no single weather event – no one heat wave, hurricane or storm – can be definitively linked to climate change, the series of unpredictable and extreme weather events are really starting to add up in Virginia. The recent derecho storm, which left 1.2 million Virginians without power, was just one of 7 extreme weather events that have impacted Virginians in the first half of 2012. This July 3 Washington Post column (<http://bit.ly/July3Column>) on the topic of climate change and recent events hits the nail on the head.
- Farmers across the commonwealth are feeling the effects of more and more unusual weather patterns. With this spring setting the record for the hottest one since recordkeeping began in 1895, Virginia's peach farmers found themselves harvesting their crop earlier than anyone could remember happening before. And over the last 10 years, bud break for many Virginia vineyards has moved up an astonishing two weeks, a huge change for such a delicate crop.

We would like to invite you to tour areas adversely impacted by coal mining and greenhouse gas pollution to help provide the full story of the effects of coal on the quality of life in Virginia. **Please join us for a tour of:**

- **The effects of coal mining on Southwest Virginia:** We can show you a community in southwest Virginia adjacent to strip mining where you can speak with community members and see firsthand their contaminated waterways. We can also likely show you an active mountaintop removal coal mining site from a neighboring mountain or an aerial tour.
- **The effects of climate change-induced sea level rise on Hampton Roads:** We can show you a neighborhood in Norfolk where millions of taxpayer dollars are being spent to raise streets and houses to deal with the onslaught of sea level rise, caused in part by climate change. You can speak with residents who are on the frontline of coping with climate change. We can also likely take you on a boat tour to see naval piers that are being raised with millions of taxpayer dollars.

To schedule a tour or get more information about any of these issues, please contact Beth Kemler, Virginia State Director for Chesapeake Climate Action Network, at 804-335-0915 or [beth@chesapeakeclimate.org](mailto:beth@chesapeakeclimate.org).

Sincerely,

Tom Cormons, Appalachian Voices  
Beth Kemler, Chesapeake Climate Action Network  
Laura Miller, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards  
Glen Besa, Sierra Club - Virginia Chapter