

Letter to the Editor

To all members of Sierra Club, Niagara, re Huntley Generating Plant, River Rd., Tonawanda, NY.
By Jane Sheldon

In the March/April Sierra magazine was an article "Killing King Coal" by Scott Martelli which hit home with me. Since I moved near the plant 16 years ago I've harbored thoughts of its closing. I am hopeful that some readers may also want to join me in trying to make some changes possible in our area.

Almost daily I travel by Huntley on my way to work. Huntley, a large red citadel occupying some prime real estate on the shores of the Niagara River, has been spewing out toxins from its 2 large smoke stacks for many years. In early summer the grounds are covered by wild flowers. Deer and other wild life are seen around the site. A lagoon separates the Erie County Water Authority property from a large coal pile sitting by the river. Before Huntley, surely this was a beautiful area.

I've tried talking with Huntley personnel re its demographics, ie the age of the plant, relative size and plans for its future, but have little luck in getting answers. In July, 2008, Huntley was denied funding for becoming a "clean coal" facility. This is good news for environmentalists since "clean coal" is unproven and may lead to other unknown environmental risks from sequestering the CO₂ and storing it. Also, the expense of the operation is prohibitive. Coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel responsible for the worst air pollution which also causes acid rain, thus polluting our waters and contaminating fish with mercury. Burning coal produces more CO₂ than any other fossil fuel and it is responsible for about 1/3 of our nation's CO₂. Worldwide coal consumption has increased because it is cheap and plentiful. If coal plants are not reduced it will cause massive damage to the earth as we know now, losing many species due to global warming. Breathing the coal emissions causes many diseases. Some such as cancer cause death. Even if you don't live by Huntley, the wind carries the smog and toxins all over WNY and Canada; its not just a problem for Tonawanda and Riverside.

Further, mining coal damages the earth's crust and severe environmental problems have resulted from mining. Mining the coal can be deadly, not just for the miner but for nearby residents due to the mountain top removal method of mining and its devastation to the environment. The coal lobby is powerful and they use Madison Ave. advertising to persuade the public into thinking that the use of coal is permissible. We realize that coal is a no win energy method.

Compared to renewable energy methods, such as hydro, solar, and wind which produce 0 % CO₂ emissions, renewables do not consume any resources such as fossil fuel. The wind and sun energy is cost free, no health hazards.

We need to protect our rights for a clean environment, an environment that sustains life and does not destroy our health or the health of the planet. Now with the availability of renewable energy methods we will have better choices to produce a cleaner, healthier world. Today we don't have to have coal generated plants or put up with the consequences of using a Huntley plant.

A new age is coming upon us where fossil fuels will become a thing of the past. This is the start of a new era, an Eco era, a green time. To help make it happen please write Gov. Paterson and your state legislators and ask them to close Huntley and ask that it be replaced by clean, renewable energy such as wind turbines or solar energy. Help make our community cleaner and better, and hopefully other communities will join this fight too. There's 8,000 coal generated plants in the USA and its time to make them history. We need to make a strong statement to the Governor that we need this change. If interested in asking your neighbors, family, and friends to sign a petition, please call or write me and I will send you a petition sheet.

Thank you,

Jane Sheldon

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