

Guest Opinion

Wood-fired power plant pollution risks public health

It seems the community has diverse opinions, as well as misinformation, about the recent lawsuit filed by the Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center and Weed Concerned Citizens, challenging the County's approval of Roseburg's Forest Products' proposed wood-fired power plant in downtown Weed. This article sheds light on the sound and solid reasons why citizen groups were compelled to file this suit.

Simply put: the project, in its current form, is substandard. It is far from 'state-of-the-art' or "best technology". The County has skimmed on essential protections for South County citizens, thereby threatening harm to residents' health, property values, and quality of life.

This needn't be the case. If the standards of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) were met, there would be no need for the lawsuit.

Solutions exist that would resolve the most important concerns about this project. The County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors disregarded both the concerns and the solutions. A slipshod environmental review process has delayed this project.

Yes, we need jobs and a sustainable economy, but *true* progress includes safeguarding community health as well.

Air quality of top concern

The biomass plant will produce hundreds of tons each year of new, hazardous air pollutants, many known to exacerbate asthma, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.

The power plant sits in the middle of the town of Weed, with the closest residences barely 200 feet away. The elementary school is only ¼ mile away. *It is unprecedented in California to build a wood-fired power plant this close to neighborhoods and schools.*

Roseburg is the biggest stationary polluter in the South County. Depending on the wind, pollutants drift north toward Lake Shastina, and south to Mount Shasta. However, the EIR did not even supply essential baseline air pollution measurements for Weed, and the quantity of air pollutants from the project was grossly underestimated.

At public insistence 1½ years ago, air pollution monitoring equipment was relocated to Weed Elementary School to measure particulates. None of this data was included in the EIR process, and is still being withheld.

After the Planning Commission approved the EIR, citizens hired an air quality expert to review the EIR, at their own expense. Dr. Pless's 32-page report (posted at www.CleanWeed.org) was submitted to the Supervisors, but the Supervisors excluded it from their deliberations.

Better pollution control technology exists

The County accepted pollution control technology for the project that would reduce air pollution emissions by only 35%. Yet RSCR technology designed especially for wood-fired power plants would reduce air pollution emissions by 73% – more than double what Roseburg proposes. *This* is what would be considered "state-of-the-art" air pollution control for this project. Both the Environmental Protection Agency and California Air Resources Board recommend this established, superior technology.

Noise pollution: Roseburg's Weed veneer mill already violates County noise standards. New biomass operations and heavy woodchip trucking will further exceed allowed limits in Weed and elsewhere. Simple solutions like noise walls and quieter mufflers are reasonable, but the County declined to require *any* noise reductions.

Water quality impacts were never resolved, including the source of the 230,000 gallons of water consumed each day, nor where 60,000 gallons of “blow-down” water, containing chemical additives and biocides, will be released daily.

Roseburg will profit handsomely each year from power sales to Redding, so Roseburg should bear the costs of meeting environmental standards. Costs should not be externalized to citizens in the form of higher health care expenses, and lower property values.

There is still opportunity to take the high road and settle this outside court, to create a win-win solution for *all* concerned. Visit www.CleanWeed.org to learn more.

Respectfully,

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