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Greenpeace activists climb deadly smokestack at Fisk coal plant in Chicago

Activists call on Edison International to "Quit Coal" and shut down Fisk and Crawford

CHICAGO— Before dawn, eight Greenpeace activists climbed the 450 foot smokestack at the Fisk power plant in Chicago. From the stack, they demanded that the operators shut down the dirty, dangerous Fisk and Crawford coal plants.

The Fisk and Crawford plants - operated by Edison International subsidiary Midwest Generation are among the oldest in the United States. More people live in range of these plants than any other coal plant in America; nearly one in four Chicagoans live in a three mile radius of one or both plants.

Coal fired power plants kill between 13,000 and 34,000 people a year--as many as one person every 15 minutes. That staggering figure includes the 42 Chicagoans who die as a result of pollution from Fisk and Crawford, including residents in the severely affected communities of Pilsen (near the Fisk plant) and Little Village (near the Crawford plant). According to a report from the Clean Air Task Force, residents are at risk for heart disease, cancer, and respiratory illness because of pollution from these plants.

"As a Chicago resident, I know that we must shut this plant down--to make our air cleaner, our communities safer, and to stop the effects of global warming. All across America, companies like Edison International are poisoning communities with their coal plants--and people like us are fighting to have those communities voices heard. We're going to stay up here until Edison International hears our message," said Kelly Mitchell, one of the activists who climbed Fisk's stack.

In addition to the toxic pollution, coal fired power plants are the biggest single source of global warming pollution in the United States, which will cause sea level rise and extreme weather, as well as droughts and lower crop yields. Together, Fisk and Crawford generate about 18 times the emissions of O'Hare airport's ground operations and equal two-thirds of the CO2 emissions generated by all modes of transportation in Chicago.

Leila Mendez, a resident of the Pilsen community affected by this plant said, "We're fighting for our lives. This plant has a significant impact on the health of our communities and our children. These plants don't power Chicago; the profits go out of state, and we get stuck with the pollution. It's time to stand up to Edison International and demand more for our future."

Earlier this spring, the Chicago City Council failed to vote on the Chicago Clean Power Ordinance, which would have forced the plants to clean up or shut down.

"Chicago is facing a serious challenge," says Chicago-based community activist Edyta Sitko. "Will the Council lead the country by quitting coal and standing up to corporate polluters? Or will it be the last major American city with two dirty coal plants within its borders? "

The EPA is holding a hearing in Chicago today on a rule that will place a limit on the amount of mercury and other poisons coal plants are allowed to emit.

More updates will follow later today.

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On twitter: follow #quitcoal and @greenpeaceusa for updates

On the web, read Kelly's live blog at:

<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/quit-coal-chicago>

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Photos available at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/greenpeaceusa09/sets/72157626758322756/>

(high resolution images upon request)

Video available at: http://comms.greenpeaceusa.org/20110523_Chicago/

This is an ftp link. Right click on video file to begin download (this is not a streaming video link).

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