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Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility applauds DEQ's decision to deny Portland General Electric's petition to reduce the stringency of regional haze pollution controls for PGE's Boardman coal-fired power plant, in exchange for a promise to close the plant by 2020.

To health care professionals, regional haze doesn't just mean less sunlight and poorer views. It means health-damaging nitrous and sulfur oxides and ozone, which damage human health by affecting lungs, hearts and even placentas, thereby engendering and exacerbating lung and cardiovascular disease, and increasing the number of premature births, and all the complications those entail.

Sulfur oxides are airway irritants, causing bronchitis, and asthma, and contributing to premature birth, among other medical problems. These compounds also combine in the atmosphere to create very harmful micro-particulate pollution. Heavy metals, dioxins and allergens adsorb onto the surface of these micro-particles, allowing them to reach deep into the lungs to damage the thin wet surface of the lung, and even cross over into the bloodstream.

The other large class of air pollutants from Boardman is nitrogen oxides. These can combine with ammonia and also create particulate pollution with the same exacerbation of lung and heart disease as the sulfur dioxides. Nitrogen oxides also combine with volatile organic compounds to create ground level ozone which causes asthma, exacerbation of respiratory and cardiac disease and can result in negative outcomes for the unborn child.

Lastly and perhaps more importantly is the impact of this plant on climate change. While controls based on this issue have not yet been promulgated, it is worth noting. Boardman is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in Oregon. The health impact of global warming is huge, with rising sea levels, more heat-related deaths, increased levels of ozone pollution, and grave loss of our clean water as snow pack.

PGE has been operating the Boardman plant with inadequate air pollution controls since it opened for operation. We have been waiting 30 years for pollution abatement, and don't want to wait any longer. We appreciate DEQ's recognition of the importance of Oregon's health, air quality and environment seriously.

Thanks for your time and consideration of our views.

Maye Thompson, RN, PhD