

Local Environmental Group Hears Report On Reid-Gardner Plant

"This is the United States of America and we didn't build a country on 'can't'" said Michele Burkett, who is the founder and president of the group Defend Our Desert.

A group of 25 people attended a morning meeting of the group on Saturday, Sept. 18 at the Mesquite Vistas Country Club to hear details involving the Reid-Gardner coal-fired power station located near Moapa, NV.

Mayor Susan Holecheck was present and welcomed the group.

She began by discussing the coal-ash spill four years ago in Tennessee, pointing out the devastating after-effects.

"It takes people like you to stay active," stressed Holecheck.

Vinny Spotleson, a climate organizer with the Sierra Club, was the featured speaker during Saturday's meeting.

The Sierra Club, founded in 1892, is the oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization in the United States.

Spotleson pointed out many concerns involving coal ash hazards.

Among them, Spotleson claimed the risk of cancer from coal combustion is equivalent to smoking nine packs of cigarettes a day.

Reid-Gardner is a 636.8 MW capacity coal-fired power station which is owned and operated by Nevada Energy.

According to Spotleson, in 2005, 54 federal violations against the plant sparked a \$90 million settlement with the government.

In June 2007, Reid-Gardner was assessed as the dirtiest carbon dioxide emitting plant by the Environmental Integrity Project, an environmental group located in Washington, D.C.

During Saturday's presentation, Spotleson reported that the Reid-Gardner plant began to burn biomass along with coal to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

This presented a problem as wood was being used from Kaibab National Forest in Arizona.

Environmental groups claim that burning biomass with coal is unsustainable.

In 2008, Nevada Energy, operator of Reid-Gardner, proposed a coal ash pond/solid waste landfill expansion.

A "right of way" permit was granted by the Bureau of Land Management.

A proposed action would relocate evaporation ponds away from the Muddy River and remediate existing ponds.

This expansion and construction of new coal ash ponds and solid waste landfill would enable Reid-Gardner to run for a 30 year period.

In order to pursue with this expansion, Nevada Energy needs two permits:

Water Discharge Permit- This is for any waste discharges from the proposed coal ash ponds with the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Water Pollution Control being responsible for setting the thresholds and issuing the permit.

Solid Waste Disposal Site Permit- This deals with the disposal of waste into the proposed landfill with the Southern Nevada Health District being responsible for the issue of this permit.

Spotleson said that smokestack fire in July and a wind storm in August that kicked coal ash up in the air raises questions about the exposure risks to surrounding areas and the people who live in them.

He also claimed that there is a high percentage of Paiute Indians with respiratory problems, with more than 50% of the Paiutes suffering.

"What would be our air quality here in Mesquite?" asked Marty Brown, an audience member.

Spotleson answered that the Clark County Department of Air Quality needs to be constantly monitoring and this is not being done.

The Environmental Assessment issued by NV Energy in 2008 put the threshold of waste disposal for the new site at 10.2 million cubic yards, which will be enough for the plant to be

sustained until the year 2039.

“With Reid-Gardner, what you find is that this is a very old and dirty technology that needs to be transitioned soon so that we can begin reducing the amount of pollution that we take into our bodies, expanding the amount of clean energy that we generate here in Nevada,” says Spotleson.

Mayor Holecheck offered the statement that “The solution to pollution is not dilution.”