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FREEZE WARNING

Coal Pollution Undermines America's Health, Physicians Advise

Last Update: 11/19 2:00 am



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WASHINGTON, DC, November 18, 2009 (ENS) - Coal pollutants affect all major body organ systems and contribute to four of the five leading causes of mortality in the United States: heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory diseases, concludes a scathing report issued today by Physicians for Social Responsibility.



"Each step of the coal lifecycle - mining, transportation, washing, combustion, and disposing of postcombustion wastes - impacts human health," warns the report, entitled "Coal's Assault on Human Health."

In addition, the report states, "the discharge of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere associated with burning coal is a major contributor to global warming and its adverse effects on health worldwide."

"This conclusion emerges from our reassessment of the widely recognized health threats from coal," says the Nobel Prize winning group of medical professionals, which calls itself the medical and public health voice for policies to prevent nuclear war and proliferation and to slow, stop and reverse global warming.

Coal combustion in particular contributes asthma, lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke, diseases affecting large portions of the U.S. population. Exposure to the emissions from coal combustion interferes with lung development, increases the risk of heart attacks, and compromises intellectual capacity due to mercury exposure, the report warns.

"Coal is an epidemic that is present," says Alan Lockwood, M.D., a professor of neurology and nuclear medicine at the University of Buffalo, and a principle author of the report.

"Looking across the country," he told ENS in an interview, "tens of thousand of Americans die prematurely. Exposure to coal costs the U.S. economy \$62 billion per year."

As a neurologist, Dr. Lockwood says members of his medical specialty observe that "exposure to coal-based emissions is causative of acute strokes."

That means that people who live near coal-fired power plants are more likely to have acute strokes than other people.

In the Medicare population, where we have good national records, Dr. Lockwood says, there are correlations between peaks in emissions, as monitored by the U.S. EPA, and peaks in hospital admissions for heart attacks and heart disturbances.

Along with other pollutants, coal-fired power plants emit nitrogen oxides and small particulates, PM2.5, and these, the report finds, "are associated with hospital admissions for potentially fatal cardiac rhythm disturbances."

"The concentration of PM2.5 in ambient air also increases the probability of hospital admission for acute myocardial infarction, as well as admissions for ischemic heart diseases, disturbances of heart rhythm, and congestive heart failure," the report warns.

Dr. Lockwood estimates that exposure to emissions from coal combustion is killing 40,000 to 50,000 Americans per year.

His estimate is based on extrapolation from data in Europe - applying the percentage of deaths in Europe compared to the amount of electricity generated by burning coal there to deaths in the U.S. population and the amount of electricity generated by burning coal here.

The report points to several studies have shown a correlation between coal-related air pollutants and stroke. "Even though a relatively small portion of all strokes appear to be related to the ambient concentration of PM, the fact that nearly 800,000 people in the

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7:00PM	So You Think You Can Dance	
8:00PM	Glee	
9:00PM	FOX23 News @ 9	
10:00PM	Seinfeld	

U.S. have a stroke each year makes even a small increase in risk a health impact of great importance," it states.

In Buffalo, where Dr. Lockwood lives, a coal-fired power plant he calls "among the most ancient and worst offenders in the country" spews its emissions over the city it serves.

The C.R. Huntley Generating Station, located in Tonawanda, New York on the Niagara River, just north of Buffalo, has been operating since the 1920s.

Dr. Lockwood says it emits four million tons of carbon dioxide annually, along with 50,000 tons of sulfur oxides, 400 tons of particulates, and 166 pounds of mercury. He is particularly concerned about the health of children in the vicinity and says there are 21 schools nearby and downwind of this power plant, not counting those across the river in Canada.

NRG Energy, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Northern States Power Company, purchased the Huntley station from Niagara Mohawk in 1999 and has since taken corrective measures to eliminate some of the emissions.

NRG had planned an integrated gasification combined cycle project at Huntley, which would have turned coal into gas and removed impurities before burning the gas to generate electricity. However, in 2008, the joint NRG-New York Power Authority project was shelved for lack of funding, a victim of the economic downturn, the company says.

Dr. Lockwood says it is essential to clean up existing coal-fired power plants by enforcing the Clean Air Act maximum achievable control technology requirement and also by denying permits for the construction of new coal generating stations. "We need to rely increasingly on renewables such as wind or solar power," he says.

He says that Physicians for Social Responsibility supports the U.S. EPA's move announced Tuesday to strengthen air quality standards for sulfur dioxide. "Coal-fired power plants are the leading source of sulfur dioxide emissions," he said. "The EPA's move is a welcome step in the right direction."

Physicians for Social Responsibility also endorses a climate goal of no more than 350 parts per million of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This is the level that most scientists say will help forestall the worst consequences of climate change.

As a tax-exempt 501c nonprofit corporation, PSR is limited in amount of lobbying that it can do as an organization. But Dr. Lockwood says that every time he comes to Washington, he knocks on the doors of his elected representatives to share his views with them.

Today he did more than knock. Introducing the new report, Dr. Lockwood held a Congressional briefing that was attended by staff members from the offices of 23 senators. "Right now, Congress is wrestling with energy bills and global warming legislation," he said. "Ultimately, it will be Congress or the executive branch of government that passes rules and laws to achieve improvements."

Click [here](#) to download the report, "Coal's Assault on Human Health."

{Photo: C.R. Huntley coal-fired generating station near Buffalo, New York (Photograph by Nathan Cook)}

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good!

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Kardashian moves into \$4 million starter home

Newlywed Khloe Kardashian and her basketball star husband Lamar Odom have splashed out \$4 million on their first marital home.



Noa: No sex in Lopez tape

Ojani Noa doesn't understand why Jennifer Lopez is so upset over his plans to release home videos of their brief marriage because there's no sex or nudity in the footage.



Stallone blasted for driving offense

Sylvester Stallone has been slammed for flouting driving regulations by squeezing two children into the passenger seat of his car.



Osmond wins 'Dancing with the Stars'

Donny Osmond has triumphed over Kelly Osbourne and Mya to be crowned the winner of this year's *Dancing with the Stars*.

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