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Preston Love Jr.
University of Nebraska at Omaha, prestonlovejr@gmail.com

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A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT JOINS NORTH OMAHA AND CONVENES A JOINT EFFORT TO HOLD OPPD ACCOUNTABLE FOR TOXICS FROM COAL BURNING

By
Preston Love Jr.

I share an important issue affecting all of Omaha but critically affecting North Omaha residents. Coal burning creates toxic air and many other public health issues. Coal plants are responsible for **42 percent** of US mercury emissions, a toxic heavy metal that **can damage** the *nervous, digestive, and immune systems*, and is a serious threat to the child development. Just 1/70th of a teaspoon of mercury deposited on a 25-acre lake can make the fish unsafe to eat. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) **National Emissions Inventory**, US coal power plants emitted 45,676 pounds of mercury in 2014 (the latest year data is available)

Much evidence:

Mercury: Coal plants are responsible for 42 percent of US mercury emissions, a toxic heavy metal that can damage the nervous, digestive, and immune systems, and is a serious threat to the child development. Just 1/70th of a teaspoon of mercury deposited on a 25-acre lake can make the fish unsafe to eat.

Sulfur dioxide (SO₂): Produced when the sulfur in coal reacts with oxygen, SO₂ combines with other molecules in the atmosphere to form small, acidic particulates that can penetrate human lungs. It's linked with asthma, bronchitis, smog, and acid rain, which damages crops and other ecosystems, and acidifies lakes and streams.

Nitrogen oxides (NO_x): Nitrous oxides are visible as smog and irritate lung tissue, exacerbate asthma, and make people more susceptible to chronic respiratory diseases like pneumonia and influenza. Particulate matter: Better known as "soot," this is the ashy grey substance in coal smoke, and is linked with chronic bronchitis, aggravated asthma, cardiovascular effects like heart attacks, and premature death.

Other harmful pollutants emitted:

41.2 tons of lead, 9,332 pounds of cadmium, and other toxic heavy metals.

576,185 tons of carbon monoxide, which causes headaches and places additional stress on people with heart disease.

22,124 tons of volatile organic compounds (VOC), which form ozone.

77,108 pounds of arsenic.

The OPPD plants, via it's large smokestacks, in north Omaha, are in our back yard spews the toxic directly into our community.

The magnitude of cost to north Omaha residents and health disparities is enormous and should be chronicled.

Five years ago, OPPD agreed to shut down these plants and create alternate sources of to generate and provide electricity. Natural gas in one alternate. Recently OPPD informed us all that their promise would not be kept. They now say they cannot shut down the coal burning maybe up to five more years.

Ad hoc Committee formed:

I along with many north Omaha residents and leaders, have joined together and formed an ad hoc committee of environmental and health experts, advocates, and community representatives, to deal directly with OPPD

- To force real meaningful community updates and dialogue,
- To develop jointly, a plan of action with measurable time milestones,
- To develop a meaningful dialogue and accountability as to the new five-year target
- To assess the health and economic damage laid on North Omaha and it's residents over the past and going forward til alternate coal burning is ceased at the north plant

Below is the letter from the committee which was sent to OPPD, November 22, 2022.:

*“Javier Fernandez
President & Chief Executive Officer
Omaha Public Power District (OPPD)*

Dear Mr. Fernandez,

We have created an ad hoc committee to work to protect people's health in North Omaha. For over three generations, people and businesses in North Omaha have been negatively impacted by pollution from OPPD burning coal at the North Omaha Station (NOS). We recently learned OPPD plans to burn coal at the NOS for three more years than what you promised our community in 2014.

Our committee is prepared to work with OPPD's board of directors and staff to reduce the ongoing pollution as much as possible. We are organized to assist the people who have been, and are being, harmed by the pollution created by OPPD burning coal at the NOS.

Initially, we are curious - whom has OPPD reached out to in North Omaha and elsewhere to

discuss the past and ongoing pollution issues from the NOS?

The people who have lived in North Omaha have been forced to breathe pollution from the North Omaha Station's coal-fired plants for over three generations. People throughout OPPD's service territory and people in other states have benefited from the low-cost and reliable power that OPPD has, and is, generating from these plants.

*We are seeking to bring together representatives and organizations from communities impacted in North Omaha with experts from various disciplines. We want to discuss how best to mitigate the pollution's public health impacts. We think we should jointly develop plans to address these historical disparities, which have disproportionately burdened vulnerable groups.
...we request a meeting with representatives from our committee, ASAP"*

SIGNED BY A GROWING NUMBER OF COMMITTEEE MEMBERS