

What the e-mail against Duke plant doesn't say

An e-mail is making its way around the county regarding Duke Power's new coal-fired power plant which is working its way through the regulatory process.

One of the cruxes of the e-mail is that the new plant will increase mercury emissions which is going to adversely impact the health of women and babies. In fact, the name of the slide show is: "The Cliffside Coal-Fired Power Plant Expansion Proposed by Duke Energy Will Have a Detrimental Effect on the Environment and Public Health of North Carolina."

There is one problem with the title when it comes to public health. Nobody knows if it's true.

Here is a summary of the sequence of assertions made in the power point — see if you can find what's missing.

- 1) Coal plants burn mercury — 40 percent of U.S. mercury emissions come from these facilities.
- 2) Mercury ends up in water
- 3) Fish, living in the water, ingest the mercury
- 4) Some N.C. fish have mercury
- 5) People eat fish
- 6) High levels of mercury in fetuses and children can be harmful
- 7) Mercury poisoning in adults can cause major health problems
- 8) An estimated 8 percent of child-bearing-age women in the U.S. have unsafe levels of mercury according to an EPA



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researcher.

9) The amount of mercury emitted by the new plant will result in an increase of total mercury emissions.

Did you find what's missing?

Maybe asking these three questions of the environmentalists would help:

1) Please point to one documented case — not an estimate, projection or guess, a documented case — in North Carolina where a child suffered health problems because of mercury poisoning from a coal-fired power plant.

2) Please point to the documented study that shows that the mercury found in area fish or water can be directly tied to emissions from coal-fired power plants.

3) Isn't it true that the "unsafe" level of mercury concentration that 8 percent of women who are childbearing age allegedly carry is actually 10 times lower than the minimum safe levels mentioned in the exact same EPA study?

What's missing is this — there is no direct evidence that mercury from power plants adversely affects anybody's health. None. Zip. Zero.

Yes, coal plants emit mercury. Yes, mercury CAN be bad for you (but in much larger quantities than anyone is ever likely to consume).

No, we don't know where the mercury comes from that fish (and then humans) ingest.

Remember, 60 percent of mercury emissions in the U.S. come from other sources. From the state's health department web site: "Mercury is also released into the air, water and land when fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) are burned; when municipal solid waste or medical waste is incinerated; during forest fires; and during some manufacturing processes."

AND, mercury also exists naturally: "Mercury is a metal that occurs naturally at low levels in rock, soil and water throughout North Carolina."

Even if you believe, however, that the mercury comes from these plants, the science on what levels of mercury is actually harmful is flimsy.

An article from the Cato Institute addresses that point and puts in perspective these types of scare tactics. Please take the time to read it at www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=3030.

Here's the cold hard reality — there are a lot of good, well-intentioned people who care deeply about clean air and clean water and healthy children.

Then there are the

fringe, radical environmentalists who are for those things that we are all for, but who are truly fueled by a hatred for capitalism, industry and progress.

They will distort and contrive and deceive and, mostly, scare people into opposing things that really bring no danger at all and all sorts of benefit (do you realize how many people will be employed in building this facility and what it will do to our county's tax base when it is finished — do environmentalists even think about the number of people who will be able to afford, say, better pre-natal care for their children, providing infinitely more benefits than any threat the plant poses from mercury, because of this plant).

I also love how these e-mails are sent out the day of (in this case) or the day before some deadline. Much like Al Gore and "global warming" they don't want to have a debate, they simply want to scare people into acting before they've thought through the issue.

Gore likes to intimidate those who would dare disagree with his apocalyptic view of global warming by saying: "The issue is settled."

He doesn't scare me. And neither does this power plant.

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