

PGE should go green, close its Boardman coal-fired plant in 2011

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Don Snedecor
The Southwest Portland Post

On the outside, Portland General Electric's green campaign appears to do what the company's liberal customers want it to do. PGE says it is encouraging customers to pay extra for sustainable power that comes from renewable resources.

And although the utility can't differentiate between the green power and the polluting power, we are asked to do the right thing.

But what the fresh-faced youths at PGE's outdoor booths aren't telling you is that the executives at the government-regulated monopoly have no intention of giving up the coal-fired plant at Boardman, the worst of the utility's polluting power plants.

According to PGE's Integrated Resource Plan (September 2009), the utility can no longer depend on previously abundant hydro-electric power. "The Boardman plant currently serves about 15 percent of our customers' electricity needs and provides a reliable, low-cost source of power."

The PGE report goes on to say, "From

a portfolio perspective, the [Boardman] plant provides important fuel diversity and benefits from the relative abundance and stable pricing of coal. An early closure would trigger the need to consider a major replacement resource during a timeframe in which additional resource needs are already considerable."

Too bad! Community pressure is what caused PGE to move up closure of its Trojan nuclear plant, and community pressure is required to force the utility into closing the Boardman plant.

"PGE's coal-fired power plant in Boardman is the single largest source of air pollution affecting the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area," said Michael Lang, Conservation Director for Friends of the Columbia Gorge.

"Pollution from this power plant is obscuring views, damaging ecosystems, and causing acid rain and fog that are likely harming Native American cultural resources. PGE should pull the plug on this aging polluter and move toward greater energy efficiency and renewable sources," said Lang.

It's true that new Oregon Department of Environmental Quality regulations call for \$600 million in pollution controls to keep the Boardman plant operating until 2040.

However, according to the Sierra

Club, none of these new emission controls will curb the 5 million tons of carbon dioxide released by the plant annually. That carbon pollution will become increasingly costly as more laws mandate reductions.

Some environmentalists are calling for a closure of the Boardman plant by 2020. But PGE officials have been quoted as saying the utility can't consider the 2020 closure because of the new DEQ regulations.

Forget about 2020. Closing the Boardman plant in 2011 would help save the

planet, Oregon's environment, and save the utility the \$600 million it would spend over the next 30 years in DEQ-required pollution control equipment.

From an environmentalist's perspective, this is a no-brainer. The cost difference is approximately one half of one percent per year over 30 years. PGE should put its money where its mouth is.

If the utility is really serious about transitioning from coal-fired and gas-fired plants to the utilization of renewable resources, then it should close the Boardman plant immediately and put

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