

Sep. 23, 2006

## Utilities say pollution rule won't be problem

By JOHN G. EDWARDS - LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Nevada regulators are following directions from the Environmental Protection Agency in setting rules designed to reduce mercury air pollution from coal-fired power plants, but Nevada's major electric utilities say the rule will not affect their planned or existing plants.

"We believe that (the new mercury standard) will be easily attained by the utilities in Nevada," said Dante Pistone, spokesman for the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection.

Nevada Power Co. and Sierra Pacific Power Co. propose to build a \$3.7 billion coal-fired power plant at Ely and a related transmission line. They also have two existing power plants that burn coal, but the new state rule will not cause difficulties, utility spokesmen said.

"This rule should have very little or minimal impact on us," said Sonya Headen, a spokeswoman for the two utilities. The utilities already have installed devices that are designed to reduce pollution from the 615-megawatt Reid Gardner Generating located at Moapa northeast of Las Vegas and the 530-megawatt Valmy Generating Station in Northern Nevada.

The government limits mercury emissions because mercury poisoning can cause birth defects and damage a fetus's nervous system. In adults, mercury can cause emotional problems, mental damage and twitching, according to the EPA. In the 1800s, the term "mad hatters" -- later made famous in the Lewis Carroll book "Alice in Wonderland" -- stemmed from nervous disturbances many suffered because chemicals used in hat-making included mercurous nitrate.

The Nevada environmental agency gave each coal-fired power plant 30 days to collect mercury emissions data and report on that information.

Nevada did not require coal-fired power plants to collect data on mercury pollution, Pistone said. Some did voluntary testing, but the methods varied, making it impossible to make fair comparisons, he said.

The state government decided to adopt a new mercury pollution rule because the EPA would otherwise have assumed responsibility for regulating mercury emissions at coal-fired power plants. The Legislative Commission approved the state environmental protection rule Monday because lawmakers on the panel want to retain control over the pollution rule's regulation.

The state rule stems from the EPA's Clean Air Mercury Rule, which was adopted in May 2005. Under the state and federal rules, coal-fired power plants in Nevada are limited to a total of 570 pounds of mercury air pollution yearly between 2010 and 2017. The following year, the maximum drops to 224 pounds.

The first of two 750-megawatt units at the utility's planned Ely Energy Center is scheduled to start generating electricity in 2011, about the same time that the new mercury rule takes effect.

The EPA counted 332 pounds of mercury pollution from all industries in Nevada in 2004, but mines are the biggest source of mercury pollution in the state despite mining pollution reductions in recent years.

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