

GUEST VIEWPOINT: Seneca's power plant far from green

By John Herberg

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The Register Guard's April 6 editorial on Seneca Sawmill Co.'s proposed wood-fired power plant tried to place the project's air pollutants in context. Oregon Toxics Alliance would like to continue that goal.

The editorial disregarded the 470 tons of air pollutants that would be emitted by the plant by comparing them to all possible sources of pollutants in Lane County. That is one way of looking at it, but it overlooks the fact that the plant will be one of the single largest sources of air pollution in Eugene and Lane County.

As stated, the plant will emit 186 tons of nitrogen oxides, or NO_x, and 200 tons of carbon monoxide, or CO, per year. That would make this one facility the second-largest emitter of both of those toxins in all of Eugene. Furthermore, it would be the fourth-largest emitter of NO_x and seventh-largest for CO in Lane County.

That's significant, because NO_x and CO are known to cause respiratory problems. Given that Lane County already has a higher rate of asthma than Oregon and the nation, shouldn't limiting asthma causing pollutants be a priority? NO_x and CO also aggravate heart disease. NO_x is a major contributor to smog and global warming, and it has been linked to premature death.

NO_x and CO account for most of the pollutants, but there's still another 86 tons per year to consider. Many of them are known or suspected carcinogens, and most cause heart and lung problems. Let's place them in context also:

The power plant would be Eugene's single largest emitter of styrene (a carcinogen), acetaldehyde (a carcinogen), hydrogen chloride (causes respiratory illnesses) and naphthalene (a carcinogen). Furthermore, all of the existing sources of those toxins are located in one neighborhood: West Eugene.

At 1.7 tons, the proposed plant would be Eugene's third-largest emitter of formaldehyde (a carcinogen). All nine existing sources are located in West Eugene.

At 1.4 tons, Seneca would be the fourth-largest emitter of toluene (a carcinogen). Nineteen of the 21 existing Eugene's toluene sources are in West Eugene.

This project is being marketed as a green solution, but it will be a major new source of dangerous air pollutants. To put it in perspective, even a natural gas power plant of the same capacity would produce significantly less pollution.

Could Seneca reduce its emissions? Yes. Seneca could reduce CO emissions by 50 percent and NOx emissions by another 25 percent to 45 percent with technology that's already being used elsewhere.

Undoubtedly, that technology will cost more. But if Seneca doesn't spend the money, the public will pay the cost with more visits to the doctor. Economists call this concept externalizing costs. It happens when businesses don't fully account for their impacts on our health and environment. It's an unsustainable business practice that must stop.

The location of the proposed power plant brings up another concern. West Eugene is already the central location of large numbers of Eugene's industrial air pollutant sources. It is also home to rail yard operations and is heavily affected by auto traffic. Yet there is nothing in that neighborhood to accurately measure air quality.

Seneca, the Eugene Water & Electric Board (which is considering purchasing the energy produced from the power plant), the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (the government agency responsible for protecting Lane County's air quality), and other industries releasing air pollution in West Eugene should work toward funding an air monitor in that area. That way we can accurately measure the impact that Seneca and other polluters have on the health of their neighbors.

The facts tell the truth, and the facts show that trying to place Seneca's emissions in context of Lane County's other air problems can be misleading. This power plant would be a significant, and in some cases the largest, new source of dangerous pollutants in Eugene and Lane County. Seneca can do more to reduce its emissions and help monitor the impact of those that remain. If it doesn't, it will be the public that pays.

We urge citizens to contact Seneca, EWEB and LRAPA and voice their concerns. For more information, go to [www.oregontoxics.org /AQ/Seneca/seneca.html](http://www.oregontoxics.org/AQ/Seneca/seneca.html).

John Herberg is a staff member of the Oregon Toxics Alliance.