

Coal: A Bad Bet

There are three major concerns that make coal a bad bet for Nevada — economics, health and environmental.

Despite what the coal companies want to tell you, coal isn't "cheap." Coal prices have risen considerably in the past year, and building costs for new plants have escalated too — by more than 50 percent in some cases. Impending global warming pollution caps, both at the regional and national levels, are going to add hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs of running a single coal-fired power plant every year. Energy companies want to pass those costs on to ratepayers even though there's a better, less financially risky way to provide power through Nevada's clean energy resources.

Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury pollution in the country. When coal is burned to generate electricity, mercury in the coal is released into the atmosphere. Eventually the mercury falls to the earth in the form of rain and snow, which enters streams, lakes, oceans and reservoirs, contaminating many of the fish we eat. Mercury is linked to severe mental retardation, cerebral palsy, deafness, blindness and seizures. Coal plants also emit arsenic which is an especially poisonous. It's a known carcinogen that does not leave a person's body once entering. That means that even small exposures can add up over time. In addition to leading to various types of cancer, long-term exposure to arsenic has been linked to major organ damage — including lung dysfunction, cirrhosis of the liver, reproductive problems, and death from multiple organ failure.

Coal fired power plants emit large amounts of global warming pollution known as carbon dioxide. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that carbon dioxide is a pollutant and it should be regulated by the Clean Air Act. Many other states are beginning to make decisions to protect their air, water, climate and public health from huge amounts emitted by coal-fired power plants. Kansas has rejected a permit for a new coal-fired power plant specifically because of concerns about the risks posed by its global warming pollution. And Utah's main utility has delayed its plans for new plants out of fears about how regulations on CO2 will affect plant financing and costs.

Lastly, the proposed coal plants will cause significant and adverse impacts on visibility at Great Basin National Park — Nevada's ONLY National Park. This prized national park has some of the best visibility of any national park in the lower

48 states. Further, this park is home to the world's oldest living thing — the bristlecone pine. The National Park Service has written comments saying pollution from the proposed plants will adversely affect visibility.