

County Commissioners Believe Armstrong Power Plant Closing Could Have Far Reaching Consequences

Written by The Office of the Commissioners
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Members of the Armstrong County Board of Commissioners are deeply disturbed by the news of FirstEnergy Corporation's decision to close its coal-fired, electric generating facility along the Allegheny River at Adrian, PA.

With the rate of unemployment in Armstrong County hovering around the national average of about 8.5 percent (Armstrong November figures), the loss of 60 jobs, 46 of them union jobs, today's announcement was not welcome, commissioners said.

"This is a huge negative for Armstrong County with far reaching consequences," said Board Chairman Dave Battaglia, "Not only are good paying jobs being lost at the Armstrong Power Plant, jobs will certainly be lost in ancillary industries, support services and by small coal mining operations.

"What impact is this going to have on owner-operator coal truck drivers and fleet operators that deliver the 50 of 60 thousand tons coal to that plant every month? What about the privately owned machine shops that service equipment out there?"

Battaglia also wanted to know what effect the closing will have on local coal prices by pulling thousand of tons of locally produced coal from the market?

A spokesman for the industry, who wished not to be identified, believes coal prices will fall here, based on the "old business axiom" of too much supply with too little demand.

Commissioner Rich Fink said "these coal industry-related federal regulations are killing us in Western Pennsylvania, and especially here in Armstrong County where so much of our economy, including all the spinoff jobs, is tied into our coal and energy resources."

Fink also made the following observations:

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>The timeline for emission changes for coal fired power plants, requirement of new standards from the federal Environmental Protection Agency, are not realistic. Two or three years are not enough time to comply with these stringent clean air standards.

>The federal Environmental Protection Agency has been “tone deaf” about what kind of impact the new standards will have on our coal-fired plants and the communities where they operate.

Commissioner Bob Bower said, “The continuance of these bureaucratic mandates not only leads to the erosion of our most valuable asset, our workforce, it further depletes the county tax base.

“At a time when job creation is our highest priority, it is very disappointing to find that we are losing another multi-employment facility,” Bower said.

“I support steps to cleaner air. All that is needed is a more realistic time for utilities to meet the new standards. As of now, those new requirements must be met by 2016,” Fink concluded.