5 Ind. Counties Exceed EPA Pollution Limits

RICK CALLAHAN, Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Parts of five Indiana counties that are home to aging coal-fired power plants are facing limits on new industry now that the federal government has determined those areas don't meet its new, tougher standard for an air pollutant that causes acid rain and aggravates respiratory ailments.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notified Indiana officials July 25 that parts of central Indiana's Marion and Morgan counties, southwestern Indiana's Daviess and Pike counties and Vigo County in western Indiana exceed the EPA's new sulfur dioxide standard. Sulfur dioxide is a gas with the smell of rotting eggs.

EPA documents detailing the failure of the five areas to meet the agency's new, one-hour standard of 75 parts per billion of the gas show that power plants situated in the nine affected townships account for nearly all of each area's sulfur dioxide emissions.

The plant on the list with the highest emissions is Hoosier Energy's Ratts Station, a Pike County plant that emits more than 27,000 tons of sulfur dioxide each year, according to the documents.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management now has 18 months to draft a plan detailing how those areas intend to come into compliance with the standard during a five-year timeframe, IDEM spokesman Dan Goldblatt said Wednesday.

Until those areas are in compliance, no new industries that would emit sulfur dioxide can locate in any of the noncompliant areas unless another plant cuts its sulfur dioxide emissions, he said.

"So essentially the level of (sulfur dioxide) has to remain at that level or lower — it can't be more," Goldblatt said.

Jodi Perras, who oversees the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign in Indiana, said the EPA notification shows the impact of the state's overwhelming reliance on coal. Indiana gets more than 90 percent of its electricity from coal-fueled power plants.

Some of the plants included as sources of the pollution on the EPA's list are scheduled for closure or replacement with cleaner-burning natural gas plants.

Perras said utilities are making those moves because they can't afford to reduce emissions under the new sulfur dioxide standard and other tougher air-quality standards.

Even with some plants being mothballed or shifted to natural gas, she said, many of Indiana's power plants will continue to burn high-sulfur content coal mined in the

state's southwestern region, keeping parts of the state under high levels of the pollutant.

"Sulfur dioxide is really bad for people with asthma. It contributes to asthma attacks and it contributes to heart attacks," she said.

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