

Ameren Sued Over Coal Plants

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ST. LOUIS (AP) — A national environmental group has made good on its promise to sue a St. Louis-based utility over what it calls thousands of violations of federal clean air laws.

The Sierra Club filed a federal civil lawsuit against Ameren Corp. on Wednesday in St. Louis. The complaint seeks to compel Ameren to reduce air pollution at three area power plants and asks the court to also levy financial penalties for past violations.

The suit follows a formal notice of intent to sue provided to Ameren by the Sierra Club in December. The group says Ameren's own testing shows nearly 8,000 violations since March 2009 at the utility's Meramec power plant in St. Louis County; the Rush Island plant in Jefferson County; and the Labadie plant along the Missouri River in Franklin County.

The Sierra Club cited pollution monitoring data sent by the company to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The environmental group held a news conference outside the federal courthouse downtown featuring several residents who live near the Ameren Missouri plants.

They cited research suggesting that air pollution from the three plants contributed to thousands of asthma attacks and hundreds of heart attacks and premature deaths each year. A Sierra Club organizer called the plants, which range in age from 38 to 60 years old, "the dinosaurs of the energy sector."

"Our region is considered the toxic triangle because of all the polluting industries," said Gary Kappler, a Festus resident who said he suffers from chronic bronchitis, while his grandson has asthma. "My family lived and farmed in the region long before Ameren built the Rush Island coal plant."

The suit comes as Ameren Missouri prepares to build a coal ash landfill next to the Labadie power plant, a project that also has drawn opposition from environmental groups. Ameren is delaying landfill construction amid a request by Franklin County to include six additional groundwater monitoring wells at the landfill, despite DNR assurances that Ameren's groundwater monitoring plan is adequate. The company also wants to build a coal ash landfill at Rush Island.

Ameren's vice president of environmental services, Mike Menne, said the utility follows state and federal pollution rules and "has been extraordinarily successful" at limiting the release of harmful soot from smokestacks.

Menne noted that a federal court in Texas recently rejected a similar suit filed by

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the Sierra Club against Luminant, the state's largest utility provider. In that case, the judge ruled that the environmental group did not show a compelling reason for him to overrule the state's environmental agency.

The company continues to face a U.S. Justice Department suit over pollution levels at two of its power plants.

"The filing of such litigation is a common tactic used by opponents who are striving to remove coal from energy choices available to customers," Menne said in a written statement.

The Sierra Club and several other environmental groups are also suing Ameren in federal court in Illinois over what it calls numerous federal Clean Air Act violations at the E.D. Edwards coal-fired power plant in Bartonville.

A similar Sierra Club lawsuit against MidAmerican Energy Co. of Des Moines, Iowa, led to a 2013 settlement in which the company agreed to stop burning coal at five of its plants in that state.

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