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NEWS RELEASE

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Plant Boss Dismisses Pollution Allegation

Helena, Montana --- The manager of a proposed power plant in Roundup said a recent challenge to the project as needlessly polluting was "just more harassment and more distortion of the facts."

Joe Dickey, project manager for the planned Roundup Power Plant, said Friday that a formal appeal of part of the plant's air pollution permit filed Thursday by the Montana Environmental Information Center, Environmental Defense and Our Children's Earth Foundation wasn't based on the facts.

The plant, which is expected to be operating in four years, will burn coal from the Bull Mountain coal mine, which recently had some its equipment repossessed.

"They just say things that aren't true," said Dickey in a telephone interview from his office in Knoxville, Tenn. "This whole thing is just a way to get people riled up."

The groups, which also have challenged other parts of the plant's permit, maintained in their most recent appeal that state environmental regulators will allow the plant to emit too much mercury, which can cause brain defects in developing fetuses.

The state made the plant reduce mercury emissions by 36 percent. Anne Hedges of MEIC said it's possible to reduce emissions by 90 percent.

"That's just not factual," Dickey said. "There is just no data anywhere to support that."

David Klemp, supervisor of the state's Air Permitting Division, agreed, saying that no plant has ever cut emissions by 90 percent. A single plant in Iowa is trying to cut emissions that low, Klemp said, but it's doing so as part of an experimental program and hasn't achieved such drastic reductions.

"Our analysis showed that 36 percent control is the highest level of control," Klemp said. "We are as stringent as anything across the nation."

Hedges said mercury is so dangerous that plants across the country should be forced to try even experimental technologies to cut the toxin from the air.

Without a government push, new technologies won't emerge, she said.

Dickey questioned the threat of posed by mercury pollution. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has listed electric power plants the largest industrial source of mercury pollution.

But natural events, including forest fires, put out more mercury than power plants, Dickey said.

"Why aren't they stopping forest fires?" Dickey said. "If these folks were really, really interested in the environment, they would come up with everything they could to stop forest fires. They're attacking the plant just because they like to scare people."

Dickey said the plant will be built despite MEIC's complaints or the repossession of equipment at the coal mine. Legal challenges to large plants are just a part of doing business, he said.

"We build it into the budget," Dickey said.

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