

Moratorium on New Coal-Fired Electric Power Plants Is Imperative to Address Global Warming

Global warming is happening, and its impacts are already being felt today.

Evidence includes disappearing glaciers, increasingly severe heat waves and droughts in some areas, intensifying hurricanes and floods in others, and more wildfires. If left unchecked, the effects could be catastrophic: millions of people displaced as rising sea levels flood coastal areas; many regions devastated by reduced crop yields and shortages of drinking water; human health threatened by the spread of malaria and other vector-borne diseases; many plant and animal species at risk of extinction.

Coal is the single largest source of global warming pollution in the U.S.

A thickening "blanket" of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere is trapping solar heat and warming the earth's surface. Most of the CO₂ comes from burning fossil fuels. Coal is the most carbon-intensive fossil fuel, producing more CO₂ per million Btus of energy than burning oil or gas. Coal-fired power plants are responsible for 33 percent of CO₂ emissions in the U.S.

Restricting CO₂ emissions from coal-fired power plants is imperative.

The League of Women Voters is calling for a ten-year moratorium on the new construction of coal-fired electric power plants. This will allow the coal and power industries more time to test carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies and to determine whether the long-term storage of CO₂ is feasible and safe. The League will work at all levels to help policy makers and the public understand that investing in climate-friendly energy technologies is essential if we are to avoid irreversible damage to our planet.

We cannot afford to wait any longer to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The global climate is changing faster than was predicted just a few years ago, and what we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. Power plants have a lifetime of 50 years or more. Building new conventional coal-fired plants today will commit us to decades of unnecessary carbon emissions and foreclose the possibility of preventing dangerous global warming.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy can meet our electrical needs.

A combination of energy conservation, greater efficiency in the use of electricity, and increased development and use of renewable energy can ensure that there is enough electricity to support continued economic growth without building a new generation of CO₂-emitting power plants. The California experience shows that this strategy works. Through a variety of efficiency initiatives, California has held per capita electrical consumption essentially constant since 1975 while maintaining a robust economy.

The U.S. must lead with strong action.

As the world's largest economy and largest per capita emitter of global warming pollution, the U.S. must provide leadership in international efforts to reduce GHG emissions. Aggressive action in this country will help influence China, India and other rapidly developing nations to take steps to control their own emissions. Moreover, by developing and sharing clean-energy technologies, the U.S. can help these developing countries leapfrog over the fossil-fuel-based model of development practiced here and take a more sustainable growth path.