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MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER

Massachusetts Sierra Club
10 Milk Street, Boston, MA 02108-4621
(617)423-5775
office@sierraclubmass.org • www.sierraclubmass.org

Phase Out Coal Burning

Formal Title: An Act to Phase Out Coal Burning in Massachusetts

Sponsor: Rep. Lori Ehrlich

*Contact: Tom Mills 617-722-2013, thomas.mills@mahouse.gov
H2612*

This bill would require all coal-fired power stations in Massachusetts to either switch from coal to cleaner energy by 2020 or close down. To mitigate any negative impacts on workers and local communities it would create a Community Repowering Fund, which would create training programs and stimulate economic development.

1. What problems does this bill address?

Climate Change and Jobs: Coal is a major contributor to climate change, which is why the EPA is issuing more stringent regulations targeting coal-fired power plants. A comprehensive, step-by-step approach could help save jobs in the five plants in Massachusetts that currently burn coal, staying ahead of the federal standards by repowering to cleaner energy.

Public Health: Nearly 1 out of 10 adults and children in Massachusetts has asthma. According to the American Lung Association, 24,000 people a year die prematurely in the US because of pollution from coal-fired power plants. And every year 38,000 heart attacks, 12,000 hospital admissions and an additional 550,000 asthma attacks result from coal-plant pollution.

2. Does the bill set a deadline for phasing out coal?

Yes, the bill sets 2020 as the deadline for either retiring the coal-burning facilities or repowering them to cleaner energy, including renewable sources or high-efficiency, state-of-the-art natural gas technology. A power company can comply with the new law by converting to natural gas so long as the CO₂ emissions from the repowered plant are as low as technologically possible.

3. What about jobs?

The recent conversion of the power station at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, shows that the process of repowering a plant involves hundreds of new construction jobs. And whether they generate electricity from renewable or natural gas, the newly repowered plants will need still need workers.

If a company chooses to retire a plant instead of repowering it, the Community Repowering Fund will provide resources for the employees and affected communities to help in the transition. The Fund's board will include experts in the field of economic development, education and training, including representatives from Labor & Workforce Development and the AFL-CIO.

4. Are any other states doing this?

Yes, Minnesota has a law encouraging plants to repower from coal to cleaner energy, and as a result Xcel Energy has already converted its Riverside, Minneapolis, facility from coal to natural gas. In 2010 Colorado enacted the Clean Air, Clean Jobs Act requiring power companies to retire their coal-fired plants or repower them.