

Better, More Responsible Choices are Available

TXU's spin machine is selling its 11 proposed plants as the fastest, cleanest and most affordable option to meet Texas' power needs. All these claims are false. Coal gasification is cleaner. Renewable energy is cleaner and faster. Conservation and better efficiency are faster, cheaper and cleaner.

Truly Clean Coal

There is something called "clean coal," but it's not what TXU is planning for these 11 plants. Several of the nation's largest power companies are adopting coal gasification technology that not only burns cleaner but allows relatively easy capture of the carbon dioxide that is produced. All of TXU's plants would be old fashioned coal plants.

"We believe the development and commercial operation of clean-coal technology is needed...We want to lead the effort to demonstrate that this technology works..."

Richard C. Kelly, CEO Xcel Energy, on his company's recent announcement to build the very kind of clean coal power plant that TXU's John Wilder says is a "gleam in someone's eye."

Nationwide, there are currently applications to build 25 new power plants using coal-gasification (integrated gasification combined cycle, or IGCC) technology. AEP, the nation's largest power company, is planning new IGCC plants, and Xcel, the nation's fourth-largest power generator, announced in mid-August that it not only will build a new IGCC plant in Colorado using the same Western coal that most of TXU's plants would use, but it will also be the first to equip a plant to capture much of the carbon dioxide the unit produces so it can be permanently sequestered underground. These trends show that IGCC technology is available today, but TXU CEO John Wilder has called it a "gleam in someone's eye" and refused to consider it for any TXU's proposed plants.

What Other Power Companies are Saying About Coal Gasification

Investing in clean coal technologies like coal gasification would alleviate many of the environmental concerns of coal-fired power plants. But John Wilder has stated that coal gasification technology is unproven. He called it "a gleam in someone's eye."

That someone might be the CEO of American Electric Power, the nation's largest electric utility. AEP has filed for permits for two gasification plants.

From American Electric Power (AEP) website:

"IGCC is a clean coal technology that combines two technologies – coal gasification and combined cycle – to offer the potential to achieve the environmental benefits of gas-fired generation with the thermal performance of a combined-cycle plant, yet with the low fuel cost associated with coal. The technology offers potential for future retrofit of carbon-capture systems at a lower capital cost and with lower efficiency losses when compared with conventional pulverized coal technologies."

-- from <http://www.aep.com/about/igcc/technology.htm>

Or maybe that someone is the CEO of Tampa Electric, a company that has been operating a gasification plant since 1995.

From the Tampa Electric website:

"The outcome is power production requiring 15 percent less fuel, achieving 10-12 percent more efficiency than normal generating stations. And, by reusing exhaust heat, additional electricity is produced. This combined-cycle process is the most cost-efficient method today of producing commercial electricity. It is also the most environmentally friendly with respect to air emissions."

--from <http://www.tampaelectric.com/TEEVPowerPlantsPolk.cfm>

Or maybe it's Richard Kelly, CEO of Xcel Energy. He just announced that Xcel would build a gasification plant using the very same coal that John Wilder has said is unusable in gasification plants.

Wilder's claims about cleaner alternatives simply don't add up. The truth is that the technology IS available. But TXU doesn't want to use other companies' technology. To maximize its profits, it wants to only use technology IT ALREADY OWNS, which means the cheap, dirty coal technology its been using for years.

Texans and the rest of the world shouldn't have to suffer the health and environmental consequences of TXU's "our way or the highway" position on technology. TXU should use the best available technology to clean up its dirty plants. And coal gasification is available today.

Renewable Energy

Our state's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) requires power companies to gradually increase their use of non-polluting, renewable energy sources like wind and solar. In 2005, legislators increased Texas' RPS to require that power companies generate at least 5,880 megawatts (about 5%) of their power from renewable sources by 2015. The previous RPS was 2,880 megawatts (about 2.8%) by 2009, and we have already surpassed that, three years ahead of the deadline. Wind power is a huge opportunity in Texas. In fact, we recently passed California to become the nation's top producer of wind-generated electric power. And there's plenty more wind out there to capture.

Recently the Western Governors' Association, of which Governor Perry is a member, strongly endorsed greater use of clean, renewable energy sources – like wind – over coal. The announcement was especially notable because it was made by Governor Dave Freudenthal of Wyoming, the nation's leading coal-producing state.

Efficiency and Conservation

When most people find themselves "needing" more of something they can't afford, they ask themselves whether they can find ways to use less of it. That's not the case with Texas electricity. Rather than endlessly finding ways to consume more power, our leaders should do more to encourage the use of existing technology that uses less power. While Texas' per capita energy use has soared, California's has remained relatively stable over the past two decades. Here at home, the City of Austin's publicly owned utility has encouraged "green building" and provided free home energy audits and rebates for energy-efficient appliances and air conditioners. The result? Austin Energy has avoided the construction of an additional power plant.

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Texas is America's #1 producer of wind energy, but its potential has barely been tapped.