

EPA ACTION HIGHLIGHTS NEED TO CLEAN UP MARYLAND'S DIRTIEST COAL PLANTS

Wednesday, February 17, 2016

Contact:

Emily Pomilio, Sierra Club, (202) 495-3041, emily.pomilio@sierraclub.org

David Smedick, Sierra Club, (301) 277-7111, david.smedick@mdsierra.org

Baltimore, M.D. – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed designating large portions of Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties as failing to meet the Agency's health-based air quality standards for sulfur dioxide, a harmful air pollutant emitted by coal plants. Exposure to sulfur dioxide pollution for even as few as five minutes poses a serious health risk to community members as it can cause immediate trouble breathing, trigger asthma attacks in adults and kids and even send people to the hospital with respiratory emergencies. EPA has determined that SO₂ exposure can aggravate existing heart disease, leading to increased hospitalizations and premature deaths. The H.A. Wagner coal plant just outside of Baltimore is one of the last remaining plants on the entire East Coast to still lack modern pollution controls for sulfur dioxide and is responsible for much of the pollution in the city and surrounding area. The evidence before EPA indicates that the areas around Baltimore violate current clean air protections set to prevent public health hazards from high levels of pollution. If the designation is finalized in July, the Clean Air Act will require Maryland to develop a plan to clean up the air and protect its citizens. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has already provided draft regulation that would keep the region's air safe for the community which was shared for comment back in January 2014.

In response David Smedick, Maryland Beyond Coal Campaign and Policy Representative issued the following statement:

“MDE already put months of work into a pollution reduction plan that would address the dangerous sulfur dioxide levels around Baltimore, much of which is attributable to the Wagner coal plant. Sadly, MDE has let these draft regulations languish for more than two years.

We thank the EPA for its recognition of the region's failing air quality and hope that it serves to galvanize action by the Department to finalize these needed air quality protections that have simply been gathering dust for too long. Marylanders need MDE to get these critical clean air protections across the finish line to avoid a formal nonattainment designation and protect the health and safety of our communities.”