

SIERRA CLUB CALLS FOR RETIREMENT OF TALEN ENERGY COAL PLANT AFTER EPA ANNOUNCES AIR QUALITY VIOLATION

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Baltimore, M.D. – The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today that parts of Baltimore and Anne Arundel County are in violation of health-based air quality standards under the Clean Air Act. The EPA formally classified the sections of Maryland impacted by the Herbert A. Wagner coal plant as nonattainment based on the federal standards protecting the public from dangerous sulfur dioxide pollution.

The EPA notes that exposure to high levels of sulfur dioxide pollution for even as little as five minutes can result in tightening of the airways and increased asthma symptoms, making vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and people with respiratory diseases particularly susceptible to the harmful impacts of this pollution.

The Herbert A. Wagner coal plant, located just south of Baltimore City in Anne Arundel County and owned by Talen Energy, is notorious for historically high levels of sulfur dioxide emissions due to its lack of scrubber technology. EPA emissions data from 2015 shows that the Wagner plant was responsible for more sulfur dioxide pollution than any other plant in nearby states including Delaware, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

In 2014 the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) stalled on finalizing an enforceable plan to limit sulfur dioxide pollution from coal plants around Baltimore. Since then MDE has failed to complete and implement these public health protections, which likely would have avoided the nonattainment designation.

In response to the EPA's designation, David Smedick, the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign Representative in Maryland, issued the following statement:

“Neighborhoods near the Wagner plant like Stoney Beach and Curtis Bay deserve cleaner air, and we need to call on Talen Energy to be a good neighbor and make it happen. The Wagner plant has been polluting our air since Dwight Eisenhower was President in 1959. Fifty-seven years of coal pollution is enough. Marylanders would breath easier if the Wagner plant were simply retired and replaced with clean energy.

Despite air quality progress in recent years, the Wagner coal plant still remains a severe source of harmful pollution and continually puts our communities at risk. Marylanders have already experienced nine Code Orange days for smog pollution this summer, and EPA's determination makes clear we have even more work to do on air quality. We're glad the EPA will hold the state accountable for enforceable pollution reductions from our coal plants. This is just another example of why Maryland needs to move beyond coal."

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