

Significant events in debate over proposed coal-fired plants

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TOPEKA, Kan.—Significant events in the debate over efforts by Sunflower Electric Power Corp. to build two new coal-fired power plants in southwest Kansas:

- Aug. 11, 2005: Sunflower announces plans to build two new, 600-megawatt coal-fired power plants next to its existing 360-megawatt plant outside Holcomb. Its partner is Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc. of Westminster, Colo. The project has been five years in development.
- Feb. 6, 2006: Sunflower submits a preliminary application to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for an air-quality permit for three 700-megawatt coal-fired power plants outside Holcomb. The project also includes a bioenergy center to capture carbon dioxide and use it to grow algae that can be converted into biofuels.
- June 1, 2006: After discussions with KDHE staff, Sunflower finalizes its permit application.
- Sept. 26, 2006: The Sierra Club's Kansas chapter asks Gov. Kathleen Sebelius to impose a moratorium on the construction of new coal-fired plants and appoint a commission to study their potential environmental effects.
- Oct. 24, 2006: KDHE has a hearing on a proposed permit for Sunflower in Garden City, drawing almost 100 people.
- Oct. 26, 2006: The Sierra Club's attorney in Kansas predicts KDHE will grant the air-quality permit because Sunflower's project is seen as important economic development. KDHE has a hearing in Topeka, drawing about 120 people, including many critics of the project.
- Nov. 16, 2006: KDHE holds the last of three hearings on the project in Lawrence, where opponents have been vocal. It draws about 270 people.
- Dec. 15, 2006: The attorneys general of California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin protest the project. In a letter to KDHE, they say allowing the plants will undermine their states' efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also protests, saying the project could affect visibility around Wichita Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in southwest Oklahoma, fears later allayed.
- Feb. 2, 2007: The Kansas House's Energy and Utilities Committee tables a bill that would impose a two-year moratorium on the construction of new coal-fired plants. The move prevents the bill from being considered further.
- April 2, 2007: The Sierra Club sues KDHE in Shawnee County District Court, trying to force it to hold another hearing on Sunflower's project.
- April 5, 2007: Tri-State, Sunflower's partner in the project, announces that it is putting plans for the third, 700-megawatt coal plant at Holcomb on hold. Tri-State says its projections show it won't need as much new power as quickly as previously thought.
- May 17, 2007: Raymond and Sarah Dean, environmentalists from Lawrence, file a lawsuit against KDHE in Shawnee County District Court, hoping to force it to regulate carbon dioxide emissions.

— June 18, 2007: Sunflower notifies KDHE that it is dropping its request to build the third new coal plant outside Holcomb.

— Aug. 30, 2007: Sebelius tells The Wichita Eagle's editorial board that she personally opposes Sunflower's project but will leave the decision on the permit to KDHE Secretary Rod Bremby.

— Sept. 24, 2007: Attorney General Paul Morrison advises Bremby that state law gives him the authority to declare CO₂ a hazard to the environment and public health and deny Sunflower's permit based on its potential carbon dioxide emissions. Morrison issues his legal opinion at Bremby's request.

— Oct. 3, 2007: Republican legislative leaders, frustrated by what they see as delays in Bremby issuing Sunflower's permit, form a special committee to examine the permitting process.

— Oct. 9, 2007: The legislative committee has its first hearing and members question Bremby. He acknowledges that his staff recommended approving Sunflower's permit, but the department later says that advice reflected technical issues.

— Oct. 18, 2007: Bremby announces he declined to grant a permit to Sunflower.