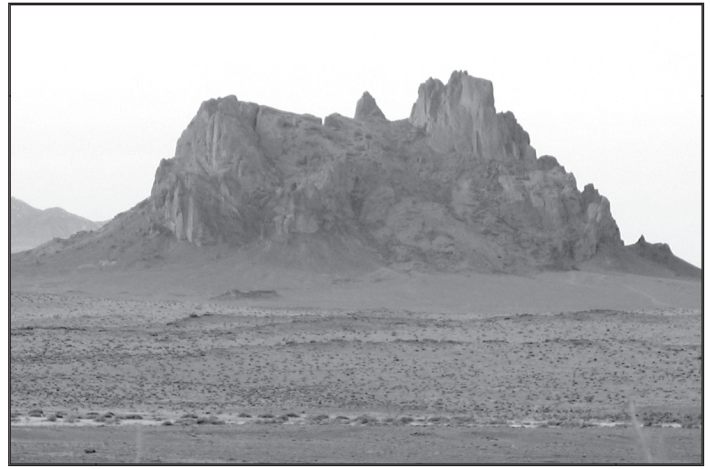




Protest sign near Desert Rock Power Plant site.



Shiprock, New Mexico.

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## COAL-FIRED PLANT A STEP BACKWARD

*By Sister Joan Brown And Deacon Jan Bales  
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Some of us in New Mexico have a vision of a future where children will be able to breathe clean air without the aid of asthma inhalers and enjoy water free of mercury. That vision became much dimmer when the EPA issued a permit for Desert Rock Power Plant in the Four Corners Region.

New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light (NMIPL) supports the struggle to stop Desert Rock Power Plant because a future that cares for creation and people is a moral and ethical responsibility. At hearings last year, NMIPL, along with over 1,000 entities throughout New Mexico and Colorado, addressed concerns that were dismissed by this ruling.

In addition, the proposed plant that joins two nearby coal-fired power plants, San Juan Generating Station and Four Corners Power Plant, will make null the efforts of organizations, such as ours, that are working to address global warming and reduce emissions. The two existing plants emit 28 million tons a year of carbon dioxide. An additional plant will add another 12.7 million tons a year of carbon dioxide, making the Four Corners region a major contributor to global warming.

If built, Desert Rock will overwhelm efforts of New Mexico and neighboring states to reduce greenhouse gases and further poison the air, land and water of local communities. Emissions from the coal plant would more than offset commitments to cut pollution from other nearby sources. The permit fails to assess and set required emissions limits for carbon dioxide, mercury, and ozone-forming pollutants

More than half of the carbon emissions that drive global warming come from power plants, with coal-fired generators the largest source. Power plants are responsible for 32 percent of the mercury emissions that taint our waterways and the fish that are part of our food chain. Mercury pollution causes brain damage, mental retardation, and other developmental problems in unborn children and infants.

Those who are least able to deal with impacts from pollution of coal plants, of global warming, of compromised scarce water resources and of escalating energy costs from expensive coal plants are those with the least ability to speak up and the most likely to suffer. This is truly a social justice issue just as it is an environmental and health issue.

Choosing efficiency and clean energy can promote an economically viable vision for a future that cares for the environment. A combination of energy efficiency and a movement toward renewable energy is less expensive than a coal power plant over the long term.

This is good news for the economically poor and vulnerable who suffer from the health effects as well as higher energy costs. In addition, economic development, so desperately needed in the Four Corners area and throughout New Mexico, can come from clean sources of energy that create green jobs.

As people of faith, it is a moral imperative to care for all brothers and sisters. From mountain-top removal in Appalachia to mesa-top removal in New Mexico and Arizona, the mining of coal is destructive to precious water sources and irreparable ecosystems. Coal mining has damaged or destroyed 1,200 miles of U.S. streams, rivers and springs. Coal mining is a major source of water pollution from washing and acid mine drainage, which occurs when abandoned mines fill with water that mixes with heavy metals and then leaks into groundwater and streams.

The problems spewing from coal fired power plants seem never ending. In addition to health effects like increased risk of asthma attacks, permanent lung damage, and premature death from smog, plant growth is also disrupted over time leading to an estimated \$500 million loss due to reduced crop production every year.

With so much wrong with coal fired power plants it is amazing that this dinosaur technology continues. In the process, we walk closer to our own dinosaur-like ending by polluting the only planet we have.

New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light and people of faith will not desist. In the coming months a nationwide collaborative effort of fasting, prayer, education and policy advocacy will focus on coal power plants and mining.

Coal is the past. We need more just means for our energy future. We need a future that is more than a vision for the children. □

