

Texas cities form group to monitor creation of new plants

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HOUSTON -- A coalition of Texas cities, including Fort Worth, Dallas and Houston, has formed to monitor the ongoing permitting process for 17 new coal-fired plants that are being proposed for the state, officials announced Thursday.

The coalition of 17 cities is being led by Dallas Mayor Laura Miller and Houston Mayor Bill White. A legal team of attorneys from Austin, Houston and other cities will be working on the group's behalf.

The group, known as the "Texas Cities for Clean Air Coalition," also includes: Arlington, Cedar Hill, Coppell, DeSoto, Duncanville, El Paso, Frisco, Hillsboro, Irving, Lancaster, McKinney, Plano, Rockwall, and Wylie. Other cities are expected to join the effort in the next few months.

"We know that the utility companies need to provide more electricity for people, and we know that they need to build more power plants to do that," said Miller. "But there are companies outside Texas that are using more modern, cleaner technologies than the proposed method of coal-burning to do it."

The 17 coal-fired plants, most to be located in East and Central Texas, are being proposed by seven different utility companies. Dallas-based TXU Corp. is

proposing to build 11 of them and have them running by 2010.

These permit requests are being reviewed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

"We have a responsibility to provide reliable energy to Texans at a cost that is economically sustainable, while minimizing state and federally regulated pollutants and greenhouse gases," White said.

Environmental groups have said the additional coal plants would add 30,000 tons of nitrogen oxides, more than 115 million tons of carbon dioxide and nearly 4,000 pounds of toxic mercury each year.

TXU has announced repeatedly that its new plants will increase generating capacity substantially and reduce total emissions by 20 percent, said John Fainter, president of the Association of Electric Companies of Texas.

Last year, Gov. Rick Perry issued an executive order speeding up state permitting for coal-fired power plants.

Fainter said that action was required because the state needs to build a large amount of generation over the rest of this decade in order to assure adequate power supplies.

"There is nothing in that (permitting process) that minimizes the requirements that have to be met," he said. "It is in full process of the law."

Fainter said many Texas cities fully support building the new plants and the coalition doesn't "speak for all cities by any means."