

Sulfur dioxide: Opponents say the DNR plan for air quality falls short

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Missouri's only other sulfur dioxide nonattainment area is in Jackson County, in the Kansas City area.

Sierra Club wants stricter plan

John Hickey, president of the Sierra Club Missouri Chapter based in St. Louis, believes DNR's proposed plan revision does not go far enough, saying the department should require modern scrubbing apparatus at Ameren Missouri energy centers.

"Scrubbers remove approximately 95 percent of sulfur dioxide from smokestacks," Hickey said. "That is the problem with the DNR plan."

He said his chapter's membership of about 9,000 people includes "hundreds from Jefferson County."

"Our position at the Sierra Club is the people of Jefferson County have a right to breathe clean air," Hickey said.

The Sierra Club recently gained at least one more local supporter over the nonattainment area situation in Susan Flanagan of Arnold.

"On a one to 10 scale, I'd say my level of concern is eight," said Flanagan, 67, who has lived in the county for three years. "But, if I had any kind of lung disease, I'd rate it at 10."

She said she only learned of the sulfur dioxide pollution when asked to sign a clean air petition from the Sierra Club en-

vironmental group. She said she believes scrubbers should be added to the Rush Island Energy Center along with other measures advocated by the Sierra Club.

"I think the DNR should be more active in cleaning up the air," Flanagan said.

Terlizzi said the DNR does not tell a company how to attain federal emissions limits.

"The department's role in this process is to set emission limits for each facility," she said. "The facilities have the ability to choose the methods they will use to meet the emission limits."

Doe Run, Ameren Missouri offer their response

Gary Hughes, general manager of Doe Run's Herculaneum plant, issued a statement noting that sulfur dioxide levels were improving even before Doe Run shut down its smelter.

"Before the new standard went into effect, and before our smelter closed in December 2013, the levels of sulfur dioxide in the area had already dropped by half," he said.

People should take note of the size of the numbers involved, Hughes said.

"We are talking about measurements that are in the parts-per-billion range, so while the numbers have changed dramatically, we are looking at infinitesimal measurements."

The impact of regulation is complex, Hughes' statement said.

Since the smelter shutdown, monitoring shows that sulfur dioxide levels in Herculaneum have plummeted – falling from 268 parts per billion in calendar year 2012, to 143 ppb in 2013, to 23 ppb in 2014, the DNR reports.

"Numbers tell only a portion of the story. The question with any new regulation is what have we gained and what have we lost.

"Environmental success is important. The difficulty lies in balancing all aspects of sustainability – the social, economic and environmental responsibilities. The ultimate success of the effort to reduce sulfur dioxide should be measured using all three criteria."

Ameren Missouri officials said the company has and will comply with government regulations regarding sulfur dioxide emissions.

However, they say they want all involved to make sure the procedures used to estimate future contamination levels, called "modeling," are accurate.

"Modeling is used to estimate (sulfur dioxide) emissions, however, in many cases the models are skewed toward giving higher (sulfur dioxide) concentrations than actually exists – in other words, modeling is looking for a worse case versus measurement of actual air quality," said Steve Whitworth, Ameren

Services senior director environmental policy and analysis, at the DNR April 30 public hearing.

Ameren Missouri's public relations personnel sent a transcript of Whitworth's statement at the hearing when contacted for a comment for this story.

Whitworth also noted the greatly improved sulfur dioxide readings at the Herculaneum monitor, one of six monitors in the St. Louis metropolitan area and the only monitor in Jefferson County.

"Based on the monitoring system, measured (sulfur dioxide) values are significantly below the federal ambient air quality standard," Whitworth said.

When asked if Ameren Missouri would consider installing scrubbing apparatus, a spokesman responded with a statement saying, in part, "We have made substantial investments to improve air quality, and we believe the area around the Rush Island Energy Center fully complies with federal and state air quality standards. Therefore, additional emissions control systems at the center aren't necessary."



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