

**Sierra Student Coalition  
Campuses Beyond Coal  
Sample Letters to the Editor**



**Overall Message - Localizable**

To the Editor,

Students and young people have been at the forefront of every major social justice movement in recent history—and now we are leading the fight for clean energy.

Thanks to student efforts, more than 600 universities have committed to reduce their carbon emissions to zero through the President’s Climate Commitment. Unfortunately, many schools continue to rely on coal to meet their energy needs.

Here at **UNIVERSITY...Include brief local campus coal-use information.**

This is unacceptable, and it’s why the Sierra Student Coalition and the Sierra Club are launching a nationwide campaign for coal-free schools and communities. By retiring campus-based coal plants and getting our schools off coal purchased from the grid, we will be investing in, developing, and modeling our vision for a clean energy future. We need to act now. **Include next campus event or way to plug into the campaign if relevant.**

Sincerely,  
XX

**Global Warming**

To the Editor,

Students and young people have been at the forefront of every major social justice movement in recent history—and now we are leading the fight for clean energy.

Thanks to student efforts, more than 600 universities have committed to reduce their carbon emissions to zero through the President’s Climate Commitment. But all those signatures aside, many schools continue to rely on coal to meet their energy needs, making it impossible to meet the zero emissions goal and keeping us locked in to a dirty future.

Coal plants emit more than 30% of the nation’s annual carbon dioxide emissions, making them a major contributor to global warming. If we don’t take steps to limit the carbon emissions from coal plants, we will not be able to meet the challenges global warming poses.

This is unacceptable, and it’s why the Sierra Student Coalition and the Sierra Club are launching a nationwide campaign for coal-free schools and communities. By retiring campus-based coal plants and getting our schools off coal purchased from the grid, we will be investing in, developing, and modeling our vision for a clean energy future.

Sincerely,  
XX

## **Health Issues**

To the Editor,

Students and young people have been at the forefront of every major social justice movement in recent history—and now we are leading the fight for clean energy. Unfortunately, many schools continue to rely on coal to meet their energy needs, making it impossible to meet the zero emissions goal and keeping us locked in to a dirty future.

Burning coal also creates significant health impacts, including asthma, lung cancer and other respiratory issues. Each year 21,000 hospitalizations, 38,000 heart attacks and 24,000 deaths are caused by pollution from coal plants.

Coal plants are one of the largest sources of mercury pollution in the U.S. Mercury pollution causes brain damage and other developmental problems in unborn children and infants, and has been linked to a greater risk of coronary heart disease in men.

This is unacceptable, and it's why the Sierra Student Coalition and the Sierra Club are launching a nationwide campaign for coal-free schools and communities. By retiring campus-based coal plants and getting our schools off coal purchased from the grid, we will be investing in, developing, and modeling our vision for a clean energy future.

Sincerely,  
XX

## **University Innovation**

To the Editor,

Students and young people have been at the forefront of every major social justice movement in recent history—and now we are leading the fight for clean energy. Thanks to student efforts, more than 600 universities have committed to reduce their carbon emissions to zero through the President's Climate Commitment.

Unfortunately, many schools continue to rely on coal to meet their energy needs, making it impossible to meet the zero emissions goal and keeping us locked in to a dirty future. It's time for these schools to follow through and begin working to lower carbon dioxide emissions as quickly as possible, starting with ending their dependence on coal.

Universities should be leaders in technological innovation and sustainability, creating the models for a green society and investing in the future. They should be places of learning, development and growth where young people can thrive, not homes to dangerous and polluting 19<sup>th</sup> century energy technology

Campuses have the opportunity to break their dependence on toxic practices at this critical period and pioneer a clean energy future. We need to take the lead and move beyond coal, starting right here **[at school]**.

Sincerely,  
XX

**Sierra Student Coalition  
Campuses Beyond Coal  
Sample Opinion-Editorial**



Students and young people have been at the forefront of every major social justice movement in recent history—and now we are leading the fight for clean energy. Thanks to student efforts, more than 600 universities have committed to reduce their carbon emissions to zero through the President’s Climate Commitment.

But all those signatures aside, many schools continue to rely on coal to meet their energy needs, making it impossible to meet the zero emissions goal and keeping us locked in to a dirty future.

Here at **UNIVERSITY...Include local campus coal-use information.**

This is unacceptable, and it’s why the Sierra Student Coalition and the Sierra Club are launching a nationwide campaign for coal-free schools and communities. Transitioning away from coal to 100 percent clean energy solutions for every campus in the country is a critical step in ending our nation’s dependence on coal. By retiring campus-based coal plants and getting our schools off coal purchased from the grid, we will be investing in, developing, and modeling our vision for a clean energy future.

Coal is one of the most dangerous and dirty energy sources today, not just because it pollutes people’s communities from cradle to grave, or because it is the leading contributor to global warming, but because coal is holding us back from bringing about a clean, secure, energy future.

Coal plants emit more than 30% of the nation’s annual carbon dioxide emissions, making them a major contributor to global warming. If we don’t take steps to limit the carbon emissions from coal plants, we will not be able to meet the challenges global warming poses.

Beyond global warming, burning coal also creates significant health impacts, including asthma, lung cancer and other respiratory issues. Each year 21,000 hospitalizations, 38,000 heart attacks and 24,000 deaths are caused by pollution from coal plants.

Coal plants are one of the largest sources of mercury pollution in the U.S. Mercury pollution causes brain damage and other developmental problems in unborn children and infants, and has been linked to a greater risk of coronary heart disease in men. The U.S. Geological Survey also just released a report showing that every fish they tested recently from more than 300 water bodies contained mercury.

Even at the beginning of its life cycle, coal causes significant damage. All coal mining—especially mountaintop removal coal mining—devastates communities and jeopardizes drinking water supplies, not to mention the destruction of wildlife habitats. And since the coal doesn’t stay in Appalachia, we are all connected to this harmful practice.

Once coal is burned, we’re left with coal combustion waste, or coal ash. These coal ash sites contain harmful levels of arsenic, lead, mercury and other toxins, which can leach out and slowly contaminate drinking water sources or flood nearby communities with toxic sludge, as happened last year in Tennessee.

Instead of spending millions trying to fix old coal technology, we should be putting money toward wind, solar and energy efficiency technologies that will secure our future. In many cases, the costs of renewable energy are already less than coal.

For those universities that have started taking steps toward clean energy, the Presidents Climate Commitment was just the beginning. Now it's time for these schools to follow through and begin working to lower carbon dioxide emissions as quickly as possible, starting with ending their dependence on coal.

Universities should be leaders in technological innovation and sustainability, creating the models for a green society. They should be places of learning, development and growth where young people can thrive, not homes to dangerous and polluting 19<sup>th</sup> century energy technology.

Some schools like the University of Wisconsin - Madison, Ball State and Cornell have already begun to transition away from coal with clean, renewable technologies. The transition is possible and it's happening.

Campuses have the opportunity to break their dependence on toxic practices at this critical period and pioneer a clean energy future. We need to take the lead and move beyond coal, starting right here **[at school]**. We have an opportunity to shape our future-- to create clean energy jobs, breathe clean air, and meet this climate challenge head on—but we need to act now. **Include next campus event or way to plug into the campaign if relevant.**