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Virginia Air Board to seek binding agreement to control coal dust

Richmond, Virginia – In a positive step for communities and for the environment, the Virginia Air Board this week directed the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to work with other agencies and with the coal industry to develop a binding agreement for harmful coal dust suppression in the community of Roda in Wise County, VA and to report back to the Air Board at its next meeting on November 20, 2009.

“Ideally, dust would not be carried through the community of Roda. It would be contained at the mining site, “ said Pete Ramey who is a former long time resident of the community of Roda.

At the Air Board's last hearing in April, community members from Wise County presented the findings of an air monitoring expert that documented the dangerous dust levels created by trucks hauling coal through Roda in Southwest Virginia.
(<http://www.sierraclub.org/coal/factsheets.aspx>)

In response to the alarming results of the study that documented coal dust at more than three time EPA safety levels, the board in April directed the Department of Environmental Quality to conduct its own analysis of the problem and to work with all parties involved to solve the problem.

At Thursday's hearing, the Air Board heard reports from DEQ staff and from Cumberland Resources Corporation, one of the coal companies mining near Roda, in addition to citizens from Wise County. It was reported by DEQ staff that a number of measures have been implemented by the coal company since the April Air Board meeting including installing truck washes and washing all trucks before they leave the mine site, paving access roads to the mine, and running water trucks and sweeper trucks to keep roads clear of dust.

“We were concerned that the moment this study becomes history, so would the voluntary measures that were taken so expediently, “ said Kathy Selvage.

“We are pleased that the Air Board recognizes that voluntary measures simply don't protect public health,” said Glen Besa, Director of the Sierra Club-Virginia Chapter. “We urge the board to broaden its focus to other communities similarly situated to Roda where health related dust problems persist.”

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