

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, November 5, 2020

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American Electric Power to Stop Burning Coal at Power Plants in Texas and Indiana

Austin, Texas -- American Electric Power, parent company of Southwestern Electric Power Company (SWEPCO), announced a fleetwide compliance plan to address coal ash and toxic water pollution, which includes plans to end coal use at its Pirkey and Welsh coal plants in east Texas. In addition, AEP announced it will spend tens of millions of dollars to update ash disposal systems at plants in West Virginia and Arkansas and divest its interest in the Rockport coal plant in Indiana in 2022.

A report last year detailed groundwater contamination concerns at the Pirkey and Welsh plants. At Welsh, cobalt readings exceeded permissible levels by more than 100 times the standard. According to Sierra Club's analysis, the continued operation of these expensive and polluting coals plants in Texas was also resulting in millions of dollars in excess costs to SWEPCO customers each year.

Sierra Club has urged SWEPCO to retire its coal plants and save customers money for years. Sierra Club and SWEPCO reached an agreement to retire Dolet Hills earlier this year. Last month, Sierra Club filed a report with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asking it to expand the sulfur dioxide nonattainment area to include Pirkey coal plant because of its significant air pollution contributions in Longview, Texas. In 2016 and 2018 proceedings, Sierra Club challenged SWEPCO's decision to invest hundreds of millions of ratepayer dollars to comply with environmental regulations and extend the life of these plants.

In response to this agreement, Chrissy Mann, Senior Campaign Representative with the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign in Texas, released the following statement:

"Retiring increasingly expensive coal plants is an easy financial decision that will also reduce dangerous air pollution during a respiratory pandemic. Amid this economic and public health crisis, we encourage SWEPCO to prioritize new clean energy jobs for its workers and people impacted by decades of pollution near the coal plants it operates. While we are pleased with the reduction in coal use in Texas, we are disappointed that the company is moving forward with plans to spend tens of millions to prop up old coal plants across the fleet in Arkansas, Indiana and West Virginia. Americans across the country are entitled to clean air and clean water."