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TCEQ gives Xcel a 4-year free pass to violate pollution safeguards and approves additional gas burning at Amarillo coal plant without public input

Austin, TX - The Texas Commission on Environmental Policy (TCEQ) commissioners approved an “Agreed Enforcement Order” with Xcel Energy, the owner of the Harrington Coal Plant, for violations of air quality standards that are putting the health of nearby residents at risk. Under the terms of the enforcement agreement, which were never subject to meaningful public input, the coal plant owner agreed to end its use of dirty coal and convert the plant to run on gas by January 1, 2025.

This decision comes a month after Sierra Club submitted a modeling [report](#) and relied on State of Texas monitored data to show that Xcel’s Harrington coal plant in Amarillo is causing significant and routine violations of public health standards for sulfur dioxide pollution in the surrounding community. In the Texas Panhandle, state monitoring data from near Harrington shows dangerous SO₂ pollution levels of up to three times the public health standard.

Sierra Club’s reports show that this pollution is worse locally in Amarillo than previously understood. Sulfur dioxide pollution is not only harmful by itself in the immediate area, but it contributes to fine particulate matter which travels downwind, endangering families across Texas and the central United States. Fine particulate matter is deadly, and a study by the Clean Air Task Force estimates that the Harrington plant is responsible for 24 premature deaths every year.

TCEQ’s Agreed Enforcement Order represents a clear acknowledgement that the plant is causing violations of the public health standards, but it gives Xcel a free pass to continue violating the law for another four years while the Company implements its already-decided upon business plan to switch from uneconomic coal to gas. Instead of switching to yet another soon-to-be-uneconomic fuel, Xcel should be investing in abundant and cheap solar energy in the region, in addition to wind and battery storage technology.

According to the NAACP’s Toll from Coal report, the Harrington plant receives an F grade for its impact on communities of color. The proposed order only prolongs Harrington’s harmful impact to those communities.

Sierra Club will continue to look at all options to appeal the agreed order and advocate for a faster closure of the coal plant and cleaner alternatives to gas.

In response to this agreement, Cyrus Reed, Interim Director of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, released the following statement:

“TCEQ is proposing a free pass to one of the panhandle’s most notorious polluters. We cannot ignore the ongoing harm that Xcel is causing every day it continues to operate the Harrington plant, and the plant should cease violations immediately, which impact the health and well-being of hard-working Texans in the area. There is no doubt that ending coal use is a necessary step, but Xcel has negotiated one fossil fuel for another. Xcel should walk the walk of the carbon-neutral vision it laid out with great fanfare last year, and support an investment in clean energy for Amarillo, rather than sign itself up as another customer for the gas barons of the Permian basin.”

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About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America’s largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3 million members and supporters. In addition to helping people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit www.sierraclub.org.