

## NRG official, others praise plan for coal-to-gas switch at Joliet in Illinois

Illinois EPA takes comment on draft air construction permit for this conversion project

09/29/2015 by Barry Cassell

Posted to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency website on Sept. 29 was the transcript of a Sept. 24 local public hearing about an air permit change that would allow the **Midwest Generation** unit of **NRG Energy** (NYSE: NRG) to do a coal-to-gas switch at the Joliet power plant.

Bill Naglosky, Station Director at Joliet, told the crowd: "Joliet Generating Station can produce 1,468 megawatts of electricity, enough to power more than 1.6 million homes. Our stated practice and goal is to operate our units in full compliance with all environmental laws and regulations, to ensure that we consistently and constantly monitor our operations for compliance and to look for opportunities to improve our environmental performance.

"We are proud of the opportunity that the proposed gas conversion provides. We will keep jobs in the area for both our direct station employees and for hundreds and hundreds of contractors and laborers that we use throughout the year. Many of the people who work at Joliet live in the Joliet area. There is a proposed rule before the Illinois Pollution Board that will limit the sulfur dioxide emissions at Joliet to a level that can only be achieved by fuel conversion. Midwest Generation fully supports the 20 IEPA's proposal to the Board and has applied for the permit to construct natural gas burners on the units that is the subject of tonight's meeting.

"IEPA's proposed permit places limits on the operation of Joliet units via fuel throughput and total emissions. Joliet's conversion from coal to natural gas is projected to reduce actual plant emissions of sulfur dioxide by more than 99 percent per year, actual emissions of particulate matter by more than 95 percent, actual emissions of fine particulate matter by more than 90 percent, and actual NOx emissions by more than 80 percent per year."

John Riel, representing the Boilermakers Union, said at the hearing: "First, I would like to thank Midwest Gen for being a good employer, in trying to keep these plants open and by doing these conversions, instead of closing the plants down." He went on to support the project, as did other union representatives at the hearing.

James Harrod, the project manager for **Hayes Mechanical**, the contractor that has been awarded the contract to work on this conversion, testified: "Hayes Mechanical would like to express their opinion to support this permit and grant the permit so the construction project can go forward. Our company has worked with Midwest Generation for close to 100 years. We will be a 100-hundred year old company from 1918. We've employed pipefitters, boilermakers and millwrights in the Will County, Cook County, Illinois, area for almost 100 years. We have good-paying jobs for these crafts people. This project will peek out with just the Hayes Mechanical portion at 300 craftspersons. These are good-paying jobs for local residents in Will County, Cook County, and the area around this plant."

No party spoke against the conversion at the hearing. The Illinois EPA is out for written public comment until Oct. 9 on this draft permit.

The boilers at the Joliet station currently burn low-sulfur western coal. U.S. Energy Information Administration data

shows deliveries to the plant earlier this year of coal out of **Peabody Energy's** North Antelope Rochelle mine in the Wyoming end of the Powder River Basin, with the contract shown to expire in December 2016.

As part of this conversion project, Midwest Generation would also construct a natural gas-fired auxiliary boiler and natural gas-fired fuel heaters. The covered facilities under this permitting are Units 6-8, which the *GenerationHub* database shows as the only operating units at the plant. Notable is that Units 7 and 8 are part of what is often called Joliet 29, which is just across the Des Plaines River from Joliet 9, which consists of Unit 6.

The existing Joliet Station currently has five large coal-fired boilers that produce steam that is used to generate electricity. These boilers will be converted to burn natural gas. The covered boilers are: Boiler 5 also known as Unit 6 - **Babcock and Wilcox** Boiler, Nominal 3,543 mmBtu/hr; Boilers 71 and 72/ Unit 7 - **Combustion Engineering** boilers, Nominal 6,034 mmBtu/hr, combined; and Boilers 81 and 82/ Unit 8 - **Combustion Engineering** boilers, Nominal 6,386 mmBtu/hr, combined.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Barry Cassell is Chief Analyst for *GenerationHub* covering coal and emission controls issues, projects and policy. He has covered the coal and power generation industry for more than 26 years, beginning in November 2011 at *GenerationHub* and prior to that as editor of SNL Energy's *Coal Report*. He was formerly with *Coal Outlook* for 15 years as the publication's editor and contributing writer, and prior to that he was editor of *Coal & Synfuels Technology* and associate editor of *The Energy Report*. He has a bachelor's degree from Central Michigan University.

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