

Testimony for Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Sunset Hearing

By James H. F. Williams

Subject: Effect of air pollution on senior citizens and the need for an overhaul of the TCEQ

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My name is James H. F. Williams. I have lived in Texas all my life except for the time I was in college and in the military. I am a decorated Vietnam era veteran. I am a Senior nearly 66 years of age.

I am here today because the TCEQ is trying to kill me! Actually they are not trying to kill me. They just don't care if I die. Let's take a for instance: The TCEQ recently permitted a coal powered plant in Matagorda county. (This was despite the objections of administrative law judges.) Over the life of this plant, it will emit ~5,000 tons of acid rain producing sulfur dioxide, 4,000 ton of ozone creating nitrogen oxides (NOx), ~1,000 tons of particulate material, and tons of volatile organic compounds, ammonia, and toxic waste. Why would anyone permit a plant that would create so much pollution?

It has been estimated that this increase in pollution will cause the premature deaths of 660 residents of Matagorda County, increase many serious health problems including heart attacks, and will cost \$5.4 billion dollars in increased health costs. And that is only in Matagorda County. It does not include health problems and increased premature deaths in surrounding counties. (The TCEQ somehow thinks that county boundaries are like a high glass wall that prevents pollution from going from one county to another.) And whose health is most adversely affected by these pollutants ? Seniors and kids. Why would you permit a plant that would cause so many health problems and even deaths?

This plant is not even needed as an electricity producer. The biggest excuse for the Matagorda coal plant is "jobs". But this coal plant also destroys jobs. It will destroy tourism jobs, shipping and fishing jobs and farming jobs. Who will want to go fishing in lakes where the fish are inedible because they are full of mercury?

A while back, there was a TCEQ hearing in Houston. A number of people asked the Executive Director of the TCEQ these same questions. His consistent response was "My job is to give permits." That sounded wrong to me. So I looked up the TCEQ Mission Statement: It states: "The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality strives to protect our state's human and natural resources consistent with sustainable economic development. Our goal is clean air, clean water, and the safe management of waste." Notice that there is not one word in the mission statement about issuing permits. This organization is so broken that its Executive Director does not know what his job is!

The biggest problem with the TCEQ is the TCEQ Commissioners. They are a pro-big business group appointed by a pro-big business governor. The Commissioners have the power to override the recommendations of their own staff and even administrative law judges. This needs to be changed. We need a commissioner to represent seniors, a commissioner to represent kids, a commissioner to represent the environment, and a commissioner to represent the citizens of the State of Texas. The TCEQ must start listening to Texas citizens.

If the TCEQ is not fixed as it needs to be fixed, they need to be "up front" with their mission statement. It needs to be changed to something like this: "The Texas Commission of Environment Quality gives permits to anyone regardless of the damage to our state's human and natural resources. Economic development for large corporations is the most important consideration. We do not care about clean air, clean water, or the proper management of toxic wastes."

James H. F. Williams