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Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ) supports Proposal 3 to create cleaner, healthier and safer neighborhoods.

On November 6th, we have the opportunity to vote on a very important ballot proposal affecting our future. Proposal 3 will require electric utilities to provide at least 25 percent of their annual retail sales of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2025.

The fundamental issue is coal. 66 percent of Michigan's power is generated by burning coal. This requires the importation of 35 million tons of coal every year and of course the exportation of Michigan dollars to other states along with it.

I raise this point because the use of coal is both a major health threat in "environmental justice" communities and a net drain on our economy overall. There is no such thing as "clean" coal and even though no coal is mined in Michigan, it tends to be mined in places that are economic "slaves" to its power in the market place.

Increasing the percentage of renewable power produced in Michigan directly links to the level of reduction in coal burning for power generation which directly links to numerous positive public health benefits.

Coal combustion is the source of 35 percent of carbon dioxide emission in the U.S. and creates several other harmful pollutants. The ones that are most relevant to our mission at DWEJ are mercury (contaminates fish), PM 2.5 fine particles (trigger pulmonary distress), and sulfur dioxide SO₂ and nitrogen oxides NO_x (contribute to ozone and other air quality degradation).

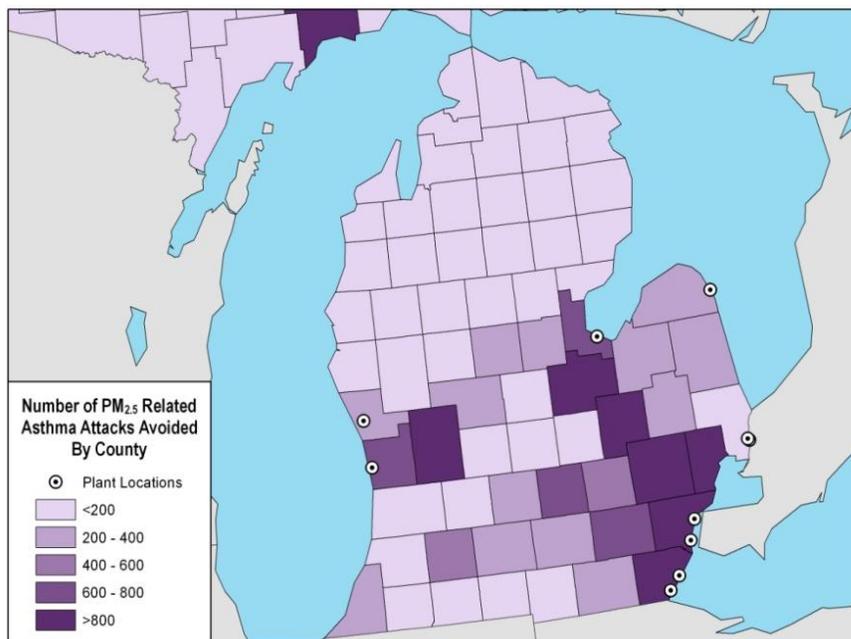
More disturbing than the pollutants themselves is how they disproportionately affect people of color and disadvantaged people. In Michigan 200,000 people live within 3 miles of a coal fired power plant. Of those people, 31 percent are people of color compared to the State population ratio of 18 percent. It isn't a coincidence that people of color account for 75 percent of emergency room visits for asthma.

Older more inefficient plants release more pollutants. Michigan is home to eight of the worst performing power plants in the country. Three of these are near Detroit, Monroe, Trenton Channel and the worst offender of them all in River Rouge. The population near the River Rouge plant is 65 percent people of color. The family income levels near all 3 plants are well below the State average.

DWEJ supports Proposal 3 because it is the most important opportunity of our time to bring relief to those who suffer. Despite all of the rhetoric around this proposal, one thing that is very clear is if enacted, the level of coal use for power generation will be greatly reduced along with the health hazards it produces.

A soon to be released NAACP study includes the results of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to estimate the public health benefits of reducing air pollution from coal-fired power plants and increasing the reliance on renewable sources of energy.

Among other things, there should be a 90 percent decrease in carbon dioxide, decrease in 170,000 tons of SO₂ and reductions in PM_{2.5} by up to 60 percent. The map below indicates number of asthma attacks to be avoided if Proposal 3 takes effect.



Other benefits include: avoiding 130 premature deaths per year in Michigan, 50,000 fewer asthma exacerbations in Michigan per year. Cardiovascular hospital admissions and cases of chronic bronchitis will also be reduced.

I've focused primarily on the information out there around health, yet there are also many positives to be derived for our state economy and in ways that will benefit the people we work to protect.

This proposal is good for environmental justice in every way. It will generate cleaner air, trigger a boost to the Michigan economy by way of creating jobs that cannot be outsourced and it will release the impact and the value of public health benefits estimated at more than \$1 billion per year in Michigan alone.

Guy Williams is president & CEO of Detroiters Working For Environmental Justice (DWEJ). DWEJ works with communities to create cleaner, healthier and safer neighborhoods and envisions Detroit as a vibrant urban center in SE Michigan where all thrive in environmental, economic, and social health.