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Dominion's Coal-Fired Electric Plant to Advance

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Air Pollution Control Board Approves Key Permits Needed to Build Facility

By David A. Fahrenthold
Washington Post Staff Writer
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A Virginia regulatory board yesterday approved key permits for a new coal-fired electric plant in the state's southwest corner, handing Dominion Virginia Power a victory in a fight that encapsulates the nation's debate over coal power.

After a two-day hearing in Wise, Va., the Air Pollution Control Board voted unanimously to grant air-pollution permits to Dominion's proposed 585-megawatt plant near St. Paul, Va. The approval by the five-member board cleared the last major bureaucratic hurdle for the plant. The proposal for the plant was approved this year by Virginia utility regulators.

The board amended the permits, however, to make them more restrictive, said [Bill Hayden](#), a spokesman for the [Virginia Department of Environmental Quality](#).

The board reduced the plant's limit for annual emissions of sulfur dioxide, an air pollutant that also is found in acid rain, by more than two-thirds, Hayden said. The board also reduced the amount of mercury, a toxin that can linger in streams, that the plant can emit, he said. Dominion was required to switch another coal-fired plant in central Virginia to run on cleaner-burning natural gas.

In a statement yesterday, officials at Richmond-based Dominion said work would begin on the plant, formally called the Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center, with completion expected by 2012.

"We have not yet had the opportunity to review the final permits, but this decision paves the way for us to start construction in the very near future," the statement said.

Dominion refers to the facility as a hybrid because it will be engineered to burn coal, plant matter and "gob," a kind of mine waste made of rock and coal that is piled around the mining districts of southwest Virginia.

The board's decision brought mixed reactions from the power plant's opponents, who had said previously that the facility would foul Virginia's air and contribute to global climate change.

Cale Jaffe, of the Southern Environmental Law Center, said he was unhappy that the permits did not limit the plant's emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas. Though a [U.S. Supreme Court](#) decision recently ordered that the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) treat carbon dioxide as a pollutant, Virginia does not regulate the gas as such.

"We're still shying away from the obligation to address climate change," Jaffe said.

Catharine Gilliam, of the [National Parks Conservation Association](#), said the board's revisions would result in less pollution in the area around the plant. Her group has been concerned that the plant will cause more haze in [Shenandoah National Park](#) and Great Smoky Mountains National Park farther south.

"There will be much greater protection of the environment generally," Gilliam said. "Whether it's enough or not, we need to look very carefully."

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