

NPPD, ecology spark debate

by Sara Schwieder

It was fodder for a spirited discussion, and the 35 persons who attended the debate Wednesday night between Eric Sloth of the Nebraska Power Public District (NPPD) and J.A. Fagerstrom of the Sierra Club seemed hardly disappointed. The discussion was on the effects of future public power needs on the environment.

Sloth said industry, and NPPD in particular, was doing as much as possible to control pollution caused by power generating plants in Nebraska, while Fagerstrom maintained that the power company was neglecting its environmental considerations.

"Any transfer of energy causes a certain amount of waste," Sloth told the audience. "Before, we assumed that water and air were free for our use. But now we've come to the realization that we must find better ways to dispose of waste."

He cited the difference between the "Technological approach" and the "ecological approach" to the environmental issue.

"The technological approach is to make use of water, while the ecological approach is to preserve the water's integrity regardless of technology."

Sloth said there is "no easy way" to entirely remove sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide—the worst two chemicals emitted into the air from a power plant. He also said that some efforts to control air pollution from power plants only resulted in a different kind of pollution.

He told the group that a clean environment would be "very expensive."

It all comes down to a value judgement: the costs of cleaning up the environment vs. health and aesthetic factors," Sloth said.

"There is a certain risk in the way we live" he said. "Technology should be there to protect the health and welfare, and I think that's enough."

Fagerstrom, however, thought technology shouldn't jeopardize the environment in the first place, and that it should be legally responsible for "protecting and enhancing" the environment.

"The past history of industry for voluntarily controlling pollution themselves is not good. We need to have some good national laws," Fagerstrom said.

Fagerstrom hit the national Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) standards for adequate pollution control, which provides industry guidelines for pollution control. EPA has two kinds of standards: A primary standard, which Fagerstrom characterized as "established at the level where there's harm to humans and quickly visible effects."

He said the secondary standard is also a level of pollution that causes damage to the respiratory system, but it "just takes longer for the effects to appear."

He said industry in Nebraska only has to meet the primary standard, but air in Nebraska at present is far above that standard. Allowing industry to meet the primary standard actually would allow degradation of the air and water in this state.

He said the Sierra Club brought a case which is currently in the U.S. Supreme Court. Should the court decide in its favor, degradation of air in any state that has cleaner air than EPA minimums would be prohibited.

Fagerstrom particularly criticized a plang that NPPD plans to build near Sutherland.

He said the plant would degrade the air and water in the Sutherland area.

Sloth replied that NPPD "will use the best pollution control devices available" at the Sutherland plant.

He said the Sutherland plant would be a "model" plant so far as its effect on the town and surrounding farmland. He said NPPD will burn low sulfur coal to control chemicals emitted from the stack and the mercury content of the emissions "will still be below health department standards.

"We're also spending \$43 million on a crash pollution control program in our four plants," he said. "That's a considerable amount, and we'll feel it in our rates eventually."

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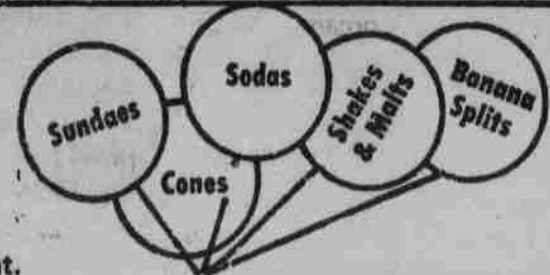
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