

# Lobbying Against Clean Air: Environmental Group Condemns Eight Utility Companies for Spending Millions to Lobby Against Pollution Controls

Article By:

Alice Su

---

## Environmentalists decry 'irresponsible' lobbying by coal-burning utilities

The **Natural Resources Defense Council** condemned eight coal-burning utility companies Tuesday for flouting the Clean Air Act and spending millions to lobby against pollution controls.

In a [report](#), the NRDC detailed how the companies have poured money into blocking or delaying clean air protections. The American public pays the price in the form of illnesses, higher health costs and more than 10,000 deaths annually, the environmental group said.

The report was released on the eve of a Senate vote on a resolution by Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., to nullify an Environmental Protection Agency rule aimed at reducing emissions of mercury and other air toxics from power plants.

“The ‘Gang of Eight’ utilities are putting their profits over protecting kids and communities from deadly, dangerous air pollution,” Pete Altman, the NRDC’s climate and clean air campaign director, said during a news teleconference. “The health and welfare of millions of Americans, including children, who are most vulnerable to air pollution, hang in the balance.”

The utilities pinpointed by the NRDC are AEP, Ameren, DTE Energy, Energy Future Holdings, FirstEnergy, GenOn, PPL and Southern Company. They are based in Ohio, Illinois, Texas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Georgia.

The report uses 2011 emissions data from each of the utilities’ power plants, as reported to the EPA, to calculate health and economic impacts. An analysis done for the NRDC by consulting firm MSB Energy Associates Inc. estimates a toll of 10,400 deaths, 65,000 asthma attacks, 6,600 hospital visits, 3.4 million lost workdays, and \$78 billion in total costs to the U.S. economy in 2011.

John Walke, clean air director at the NRDC, said the group acknowledges that companies are making an effort to reduce pollution. At the same time, however, they are filing lawsuits and hiring lobbyists to try to undermine EPA standards, Walke said. He called this “paradoxical.”

---

“We’re not criticizing their right to lobby,” Walke said, “We’re criticizing the fact that the objectives of their lobbying are irresponsible and harmful.”

The eight companies "spent a combined \$67 million lobbying Congress between 2010 and the first quarter of 2012, including on EPA clean air standards and authority, among other topics," according to an NRDC press release.

Five of the companies responded to requests for comment from the Center for Public Integrity.

“Ameren is not fighting EPA rules,” said spokesman Brian Bretsch, “Our company has a responsibility to educate regulators as to the impacts of rulings on our customers, our company, and our shareholders, and we do so.”

Ashley Barrie, a spokeswoman for Energy Future Holdings, said the utility has a legacy of “meeting or outperforming all federal and state environmental rules, regulations and laws. As to lobbying, we participate in the legislative process just like environmental groups do.”

Several firms emphasized their spending on environmental upgrades. FirstEnergy reported spending \$10 billion since 1970. PPL said it had spent \$2.7 billion since 2005 and planned to commit \$2.3 million more by 2015 to meet EPA rules designed to cut down on interstate air pollution and mercury emissions from power plants. Southern Company said it had invested \$8.3 billion and would spend at least \$1.5 billion more in the next three years.

Walke and Altman highlighted the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity (ACCCE) and Electric Reliability Coordinating Council (ERCC) as key lobbyists against clean air rules.

Lisa Miller, the ACCCE’s vice president of media affairs, responded that the coal industry has invested more than \$100 billion in clean-coal technology and reduced emissions by 90 percent in the last 30 years.

Scott Segal, executive director of the ERCC, called the report’s data on political expenditures “simplistic at best.” He said the NRDC was “hardly objective,” given its own history of litigation and lobbying on air rules, and dismissed the report’s health impact numbers as “gross exaggerations designed to scare the public.”

Walke said the methodology used in the report was based on a modeling system developed by Abt Associates, whose practices have been the “gold standard” used by both Democratic and Republican administrations for years.

---

Reprinted by Permission © 2025, The Center for Public Integrity®. All Rights Reserved.

National Law Review, Volume II, Number 173

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/lobbying-against-clean-air-environmental-group->

[condemns-eight-utility-companies-spen](#)