

# The Truth About Gob

www.TruthAboutGob.org

**MYTH:** Waste coal is a clean energy source.

**TRUTH:** Waste coal burners release air pollutants, such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, acid gases, carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), toxic metals (like mercury, lead and arsenic), ultra-toxic dioxins, greenhouse gases and particulate matter. They also produce a highly toxic ash that is typically dumped in the communities near the power plants without the protection of landfill liners.

**MYTH:** Waste coal is renewable.

**TRUTH:** Waste coal is a fossil fuel waste product. No one considers it renewable, however, in 2004, some Pennsylvania legislators have decided to sponsor Senate Bill 1191, a bill which would classify waste coal as “renewable” and as “green power.” This is not only factually inaccurate, it is bad public policy.

**MYTH:** Waste coal burners are cleaner than normal coal burners

**TRUTH:** DEP and the waste coal burning industry have argued that waste coal burners are cleaner than coal by comparing 1980s-era waste coal burners (with pollution controls and more modern boilers) to 1950s-era coal burners (with few pollution controls). This is dishonest, since the real issue is whether new plants of either type ought to be promoted.

**A comparison of a waste coal power plant proposed for Greene County, PA and a proposed coal-fired power plants in nearby West Virginia shows that the waste coal power plant would be permitted to release more air pollution than the coal power plant.**

It's also a fact that far higher concentrations of toxins are left in waste coal ash than in normal coal ash.

Burning waste coal doesn't make gob piles go away. It only turns them into smaller, more toxic ash piles, while spreading pollution into the air.

**MYTH:** The best way to clean up waste coal piles is to burn them

**TRUTH:** Waste coal burners are expensive forms of power generation. A clean (and far cheaper) alternative is to plant beach grass to reclaim waste coal piles, as USDA researchers successfully demonstrated in West Virginia in the 1990s. This can be done at 6-10% of the cost of traditional remediation.

**MYTH:** Waste coal burners produce jobs

**TRUTH:** In fact, waste coal burners produce few jobs per dollar invested. Wellington Development Corporation is planning to build the nation's largest waste coal burner in Greene County. They're also proposing to build a hydroponic greenhouse to grow tomatoes in New Jersey. The greenhouse would produce more full-time jobs and would cost 10 times less to build than the power plant.

A recently released study by the Union of Concerned Scientists shows that a nation-wide Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), using real renewable energy sources, would produce 157,000 jobs for an investment of \$72.6 billion. That also amounts to about 10 times as many jobs per dollar from renewables than from the waste coal burner proposed for Greene County.

**MYTH:** Burning waste coal is a good way to reduce dependence on foreign oil

**TRUTH:** Only 2.5% of our electricity comes from oil. Most oil is consumed as transportation and heating fuel. These are largely separate issues.

**MYTH:** We need the energy

**TRUTH:** Pennsylvania has the nation's largest surplus of electricity. We don't need to be producing more electricity from dirty sources. We need to phase out the dirty sources and replace them with conservation, efficiency and clean renewables like wind and solar.

# What's wrong with burning gob?

Pennsylvania gob contains far more mercury than any other types of coal or waste coal in the nation. Waste coal has 3.5 to 4 times as much mercury as normal coal. Gob also has lower energy value than coal, requiring that more of it be burned to create the same amount of power. **To produce the same amount of power, a waste coal burner has to process fuel with more than 6 times as much mercury.**

**The waste coal burner planned for Nemaocolin, PA will take in approximately 3,000 pounds (1.5 tons) of mercury each year**, releasing some of that in the air, and dumping the bulk of it in the form of toxic ash. The amount of mercury in a typical mercury thermometer is enough to contaminate all the fish in a 20 acre lake.

Gob is also higher in chromium, arsenic and lead. Most of that will be captured in the ash, which -- at other waste coal burners -- is dumped locally, in communities near the power plant. For every 100 tons of waste coal burned, about 60-80 tons of toxic ash are produced. Ash dumps aren't required to have basic protection like landfill liners. The waste coal industry has documented that **toxic metals like lead and cadmium leach out of ash**, so the groundwater is still at risk.

Over time, groundwater could be more at risk from heavy metals in waste coal ash than in the unburned waste coal piles we have now. Compare the pile to coffee beans and compare the ash to ground coffee. You get stronger coffee by running water through ground coffee than through whole beans. Over time metals will wash out of the ash.

**Learn more about waste coal here:**

**[www.energyjustice.net/coal/wastecoal/](http://www.energyjustice.net/coal/wastecoal/)**



**Waste Coal Ash Dump in Schuylkill County, PA**

For more info on the proposed waste coal power plant in Nemaocolin, PA, see **[www.TruthAboutGob.org](http://www.TruthAboutGob.org)**