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Dallas electricity providers as well as other Texas electricity utilities in the state won a temporary victory as U.S. Federal appeals court recently issued a delay order to the January implementation of the new EPA Cross-State Air Pollution Rule. The decision was made after state legislators, the Texas electric grid operator and several other sectors of Texas society challenged the new ruling, pointing out the lack of time and resources for electric utilities to meet demands as well as the apparent threat to power capacity with the closing down of non-compliant power plants.

The new EPA rule aims to address the threat to human health brought about by the downwind pollution coming from the emissions of old, coal-fired power plants identified from 27 states across the country including Texas. The new rule also includes new standards for mercury, sulfur dioxide, and other toxic pollutants from electric plant smokestacks. Dallas electricity providers and other power generators across Texas and other affected states indicated that there is no enough time for them to meet the redesign, installation and upgrading of these power plants, not to mention the enormous costs such upgrades would entail.

Dallas electricity provider and other Texas electric companies challenged the new EPA rule pointing out that the government agency relied in faulty assumptions regarding the impact of this new rule to the state when the EPA included Texas in the list of affected areas. These companies claimed that they were given no opportunities to provide their inputs regarding the matter, forcing them to shut down power plants that could not be upgraded in time.

Loss of Texas Electricity Grid Capacity

In a survey conducted by the Associated Press among 55 power plant operators, it was estimated that at least 32 power plants will be forced to shut down unless they comply with the new EPA emission rules. Most of these plants are coal-fired while others are antiquated units that would require large amount of capitalization to be upgraded. The survey also pointed out that 36 more power plants will be shutdown when all the EPA rules have taken effect by 2014-2015 â€“ equivalent to 14.7 gigawatts, enough to provide 11 million households with electricity.

One gigawatt is 1,000 megawatts of electricity, enough for Dallas electricity providers to power hundreds of thousands. Closing down coal-fired plants will definitely affect not only Dallas but the whole Texas electricity grid in terms of capacity. With the ever increasing demand for electricity in the state, compounded by high temperature levels during summer, the state will not have enough excess capacity to prevent rolling blackouts should peak demand increase beyond current levels.

Loss of Texas Jobs

Dallas-based Luminant Generation Company was among the first Dallas electricity providers that announced that they will not be able to meet the new EPA requirements and will be forced to shut down at least three lignite coal mines and power plants, losing up to 1,300 megawatts of capacity. The company will also be forced to cut 500 jobs from the plants and mines should the new EPA rule take effect during January.

The U.S. Federal appeal court stay order gives Dallas electricity providers some respite and time to

make changes to their power plants for them to meet the new rules. However, although many Texas electricity providers and the grid operator announced plans for power plant upgrades, there are no certainties given yet if these projects will push through.

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