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PurGen plans too costly, dangerous

The recent article in the Home News Tribune on the Linden City Council's review of Purgen's proposed coal degasification plant ("Linden panel reviews rejected plans for coal-fueled generating plant," Dec. 15, 2009) was a reminder of an insidious issue that will just not go away.

With a projected cost of up to \$10 billion, only some of the energy produced by the plant will be used to create electricity. The rest will go towards fertilizer production, and some will be captured and sequestered. Under that process, carbon dioxide waste will be pumped more than 70 miles out to sea, and buried beneath the ocean floor.

Adopting a cavalier "out of sight, out of mind" mentality to the plant's by-products won't make them any less dangerous, nor will it change the overall impact of a potential coal plant on public health. Oceanic carbon dioxide sequestration is still an imperfect and poorly understood science — one that carries serious environmental risks.

In the event of a natural disaster, leaking waste could raise ocean acidity levels, endangering aquatic life. The plant will also threaten public health by emitting hundreds of tons of soot and dangerous chemicals into the air each year, putting the 1.8 million people who live within 10 miles of the plant at risk for cancer and various respiratory illnesses.

In light of all that's at stake, what's even more outrageous is that the PurGen plant is an unnecessary expenditure. Studies show that implementing measures to reduce energy use in the area could eliminate the need for more power altogether. With billions of dollars in federal subsidies currently available to fund efficient energy initiatives, Linden has more than enough incentive to explore such alternatives.

The Linden City Council needs to fully consider sustainable forms of energy production rather than subjecting area residents and the environment to such an unnecessary and risky experiment.

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<http://www.mycentraljersey.com/print/article/20091229/OPINION02/912290313/PurGen-plans-too-costly-dangerous>