

# State: Coal-to-diesel plant not expected to affect air quality

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(Photo: DENNY SIMMONS)

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — A state analysis concludes a planned facility to turn coal into diesel fuel in Southwestern Indiana will not significantly impact air quality or health.

State environmental officials said in a document published Oct. 24 that the project would not contribute significantly to ozone and fine particulate pollution in the area and that it posed very little cancer risk.

Opponents of Riverview Energy Corporation's (<http://www.riverviewenergy.com/>) estimated \$2.5 billion project, including environmental groups and some area residents, remain concerned about the project.

It would be located in Dale, Indiana, in northern Spencer County on a 550-acre site annexed by the town in 2017. The county ranked 23rd for toxic releases among all United States counties included in the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory. Indiana ranked sixth for overall pounds of toxic chemical releases but first in terms of total toxic chemicals released per square mile.

The facility would turn coal into ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel (<https://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/lowsulfurdiesel.shtml>) using a process called direct coal hydrogenation.

In June, Riverview president Greg Merle told the Courier & Press the process would liquify pulverized coal using heat and pressure, then add hydrogen to create the fuel. It would produce an estimated 4.8 million barrels of diesel fuel and 2.5 million barrels of naphtha (used in making plastics, solvents and gasoline). Sulfur removed during the process also would be marketable, Merle said, and no waste would be stored on site.

The ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel the process would produce would have even less sulfur content than the 15 parts per million mandated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Merle said.

Since Dec. 1, 2010, the federal government has required that all diesel fuel sold in the U.S. be ultra-low sulfur diesel.

Merle said the project development is being privately financed but would not rule out seeking a government loan or funding in the future. He acknowledged there are no similar facilities in the United States to compare it to.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) has released a more than 1,200-page proposed air pollution permit (<http://permits.air.idem.in.gov/39554d.pdf>). There will be a public hearing on the permit 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. (CST), Dec. 5, at Heritage Hills High School.

John Blair, of Evansville-based Valley Watch, said that organization has joined with Southwestern Indiana Citizens for Quality of Life and Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law organization, to hire experts to scrutinize the air permit.

Blair questioned the results of the state's air quality analysis because no projects similar to Riverview's have been done in the U.S.

"Where does the emissions data come from? You can get a model to say anything you want it to say," he said.

Opponents will hold a forum of their own at 6 p.m. (CST) Thursday at Heritage Hills High School. Topics will include their concerns ([/story/news/local/2018/06/08/pollution-health-coal-diesel-dale-spencer-county-forum/681824002/](http://story/news/local/2018/06/08/pollution-health-coal-diesel-dale-spencer-county-forum/681824002/)) about possible harmful effects from toxic emissions and its potential impact on quality of life and area agriculture.

According to IDEM's summary of the air quality analysis modeling, the facility did have concentrations of several key pollutants that were over the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's significant impact levels. Those were nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and fine particulate matter.

A significant impact level is the minimum threshold applied to a facility applying for a pollution permit in an area that meets the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. States are required to determine if the facility that wants the permit will cause air quality to worsen, combining its potential impact with all the other pollution sources in the area.

IDEM documents show it compared Riverview against the cumulative effect of power plants and industries in Indiana and Kentucky such as ALCOA, Indiana Michigan Power, Indianapolis Power & Light, Big Rivers Electric and others.

After doing this, according to IDEM, it was determined the Riverview project would not cause violations of air quality standards.

Hazardous air pollutants that would be emitted by the coal-to-diesel plant also would not have a significant impact, according to IDEM's summary of air quality analysis: "The cumulative cancer risk estimate from all HAPs (hazardous air pollutants) is well below the excess cancer risk to the upper range of acceptability with an ample margin of safety."

Riverview would emit a total of more than 30 tons per year of various hazardous air pollutants, IDEM said. Most of that, 24 tons per year, would be methanol.

Among others that would be emitted are formaldehyde, benzene, nickel, hexane, toluene, ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, xylenes and phenol.

IDEM's analysis concluded that: "This means if an individual was exposed to these hazardous air pollutants continuously for 70 years, the risk of getting cancer from this exposure would be 4.6 in 10 million."

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