

Health and health related problems observed at and around UPCL imported coal based thermal power plant during fact finding visit on 27/03/2011.

Purpose of visit

To identify health related issues arising due to faulty functioning of UPCL plant by onsite inspection by experts in response to public outcry.

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Background: The imported coal based thermal power plant of Udupi Power Corporation Limited (UPCL) is situated at Kolachuru, Yelluru village, Nandikur Post in Udupi district. The location of this plant is at a distance of 35 km north of Mangalore. This plant started functioning on 3rd June, 2010. The plant produces 600 Mega Watts of power much needed to support the ever needing energy requirements of people this region. However due to commissioning first out of four phases local residents have already reported serious contamination of the environment following the functioning of this plant. The black smoke (Fly ash) coming out of the UPCL power plant chimney is causing air pollution. The by products of this thermal plant containing coal dusts are first mixed with sea water possibly after desalination to minimize pollution before disposal into a fly ash pond situated at Santhur, Padebettu situated 1.4 km from the plant. But the water from this pond containing salt, coal dust and chemicals has been reported to contaminate well water in the vicinity of 3-4 km radius of the power plant and has also been detected in the nearby field of Yelluru, Kolachuru, Padebettu, Nandikur, Yermal. People residing up to 20 km radius from the plant have reported a number of health ailments mainly respiratory problems causing cough, wheeze and breathlessness since the functioning of this plant. Floriculture has also been reported to be severely affected in 12 km radius from the plant.

Following are the **observations** made by the investigating team members comprising of IMA Doctors and Public Health Specialists.

Ash storage, transportation and disposal.

The daily byproduct comprising of ash coming from this plant is possibly partly sent to Chennai and substantial rest is dumped at the fly ash pond. This ash is ferried to the pond by means of tankers. No pipeline, so far has been laid down by UPCL for this purpose. The pond is poorly constructed without any impervious lining. This could be the likely cause behind water seepage into the surrounding areas causing extensive soil and water contamination. People residing here have reported salinity of drinking water.

There also every chance that this pond containing contaminated water can get flooded during rainy season. Once this happens the toxic waste can easily contaminate the paddy fields situated in the low lying areas nearby on a large scale and the houses at these areas could easily get flooded. The team also observed that the escape routes (leading to existing natural canal) of slurry laid down by UPCL to ease out pressure is used by local residents for storing water meant for personal and agricultural purposes .hence this cannot be used by the Public.

2. Issues related to emission of fly ash.

The team observed fly ash particles and salt over the roof top sheets and vegetation in house premises situated close to the plant. This has resulted in corrosion of tin sheets covering the roofs of these houses and of electrical cable covers as well. People also reported a decline in arecanut yield, destruction of banana plantation, destruction of flowers, poor growth of grass and hence minimal fodder for cows following the functioning of this plant. The environmental and health hazards are mainly due to inadequate supervision and monitoring of fly ash transportation.


3. The people residing here also reported health ailments like breathlessness including asthma and a number of skin ailments, which may at a later date may result in skin and respiratory cancers.

4. It appears that sea water used for cooling and other purpose is also problematic as a desalination plant is functioning inadequately, moreover it is absolutely. Also the used heated water is being lead in to the sea through underground pipeline with inadequate cooling are addition of coolant. This is resulting leakage at many places contaminating water and soil.

5. This further reiterated that possibly deficiencies and problems inherent in coal based thermal plant at Raichur, the required lesions have not be learnt so far.

Conclusion

The thermal based power plant is outdated, poorly managed and hence a serious threat to the ecosystem of Western Ghats and eco sensitive coastal belt. In such circumstances constant external monitoring by responsible citizens of all walks of life with impeccable track record. (as per recommended guidelines)is essential in order to protect the health of the people residing near the plant. It is high time that all the available technologies need to be utilized to control the health hazards at all levels.


Dr. K. Mohandas Bhandary
Chairman of the team

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