

Monitoring and Reduction of Air Emissions from Power Plants on the Mexican-US Border

U.S. companies are building power plants just across the border in Mexico and exporting the power to the U.S. market. Industry-stated reasons for following this model are “. . . . *the availability of low cost labor and avoiding some of the stringent environmental rules for new U.S. facilities.*” The Border Power Plant Working Group (BPPWG), a binational watchdog group formed by Bill Powers and colleagues in the U.S. and Mexico in 2001, has been very successful in making the sustainability of border energy infrastructure projects a major political issue in the U.S.-Mexico border region through public outreach programs, workshops for public officials, and legal action. The BPPWG sued the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in March 2002 in U.S. federal court over two power plants permitted by DOE to export power to the U.S. with only a cursory environmental impact analysis. The BPPWG won the lawsuit, and DOE is currently preparing an environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the projects. A BPPWG investigation in November 2003 revealed that one plant had failed to install the air pollution control system upon which it had been granted permission by DOE to export power to the U.S. As a result of BPPWG efforts, the operator (Intergen, owned by Shell and Bechtel) was forced to shut down a 250 MW export turbine until installation of the control system was completed in March 2004. Pressure brought to bear by Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California at the request of BPPWG also resulted in Intergen committing to accelerate the installation of advanced control systems on two remaining turbines in Mexicali from 2006 to 2005. The BPPWG is vigorously pursuing a binational accord that would require state-of-the-art air emission control and water conservation systems be incorporated in all new power plant construction in the region to minimize impacts on an already degraded environment. A good summary of the BPPWG’s efforts regarding border power plants was aired on PBS in January 2003. The clip, titled “*Power Plays,*” can be viewed online at: <http://pbs-newshour.virage.com/cgi-bin/visearch?user=pbsnewshour&template=template.html&query=power+plays+ClipCategory%3AClipCategory%3Aenvironment&keywords=power+plays&category=ClipCategory%3Aenvironment&submit=Search>
More information on BPPWG is available at www.borderpowerplants.org.