

Op-Ed

To The Spokesman Review:

The Newport Smelter: A Citizen's Perspective

The Canadian HiTest/PacWest Newport Silicon Smelter will use Coal as a carbon reductant for extracting "metallurgical grade" Silicon from Silicon Dioxide (quartz). This energy-intensive, coal-burning smelter will emit hundreds of tons of greenhouse gases and other coal toxins annually. The carbon footprint will be tremendous. The Pend Oreille River Valley, the Little Spokane Watershed and North Idaho will be blanketed with toxic emissions.

Negative Health and environmental impacts of coal emissions (lung and respiratory inflammation and disease, asthma, cardiovascular disease, cancer, neurological disease, acidification and contamination of air, soil and water, etc.) are well known.

The PacWest website states: "Production process does not require or produce any heavy metals or hazardous chemicals as by-products – All materials required during production process and consumed leave the plant as a saleable product." But, disturbingly, PacWest's statement fails to disclose the hundreds of tons of toxic emissions— the "*by-products*".

Citizens have been subjected to: misrepresentation, misleading statements, and dubious claims by HiTest/PacWest; and secretive actions, questionable handling of funds, and suspicious Public Land deals involving Pend Oreille County (POC) and state officials and the Public Utility district (PUD). Citizens' voices have been stifled and/or ignored at public meetings. And we have been totally abandoned by Gov. Inslee, who refuses to respond to letters and to visit Newport regarding his smelter project of "state-wide significance."

Despite overwhelming citizen opposition to the smelter, POC commissioners recently submitted a county Comprehensive Plan Amendment CPU-18-001 that will facilitate the location of the smelter in Newport. CPU-18-001 involves sweeping changes that will eliminate the "Public Land" designation for all currently designated Public Lands; and would impact lands across 65% of Pend Oreille county by allowing industrial and other intense development. The land sold to PacWest is "Public Land". Until the county amends its Comprehensive Plan to "reform the current county zoning laws," PacWest is unable to apply for a conditional use permit.

The natural environment surrounding Newport is already under serious threat. Our forests are suffering from insect infestations and diseases, and are increasingly susceptible to wildfires. The Pend Oreille River and the Little Spokane River Watershed have been identified as having water quality and water quantity issues. Our soils are mostly acidic, and Aluminum toxicity is on the rise in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho.

From "A Smart Carbon Policy that Works for Washington", S Hilary. Franz Commissioner of Public Lands: *"The rural communities that surround Washington's forests, farms and waterways are on the frontlines of climate change. They endure the impacts of greater disease, drought and acidifying oceans first hand—and they must be part of the solution. Natural resource-based communities need to be part of a Smart Carbon Policy for wise and productive adaptation to a changing climate."*)

Yet, Inslee supports a coal-burning smelter in our rural community that will threaten our health and our environment. From a Spokane Inlander May 13 article: “Inslee's advisers, however, are quick to argue that while the governor did work with the Department of Commerce to support the proposal as a project of statewide significance, giving it \$300,000 in startup money back in 2016, that doesn't mean he supports it outright. But Inslee’s endorsement on the PacWest website clearly shows that he does, in fact, support the coal-burning smelter:

The carbothermic reduction smelting process is century-old technology. However, much research and development in alternative methods and materials for extracting Silicon from Silicon Dioxide is yielding promising results. Also, significant advances in alternative materials for solar cells that don't require the use of coal could potentially compete with and perhaps replace Silicon.

This smelter project contradicts the Washington State Growth Management Act and our current POC Comprehensive Plan. The negative impact of this smelter on the Inland Northwest will be significant. (13) Instead of allowing citizens to be “a part of a Smart Carbon Policy” and to adopt a “Smart Growth” approach to economic sustainability that would retain our rural character, respect our environment, and enhance our livelihoods—Inslee chooses to support coal-burning technology and a foreign, exploitive corporate polluter that deceives citizens and officials in order to secure profits.

Inslee’s contradictory words and actions are disturbing, and undermines an honest approach to battling climate change that is so desperately needed.

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