

NRDC says Baard Energy agrees to switch from coal to natural gas for feedstock for proposed synthetic fuel plant in Ohio to avoid further permit challenges – Green Car Congress .com

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) [issued](#) a press release on Friday saying that Baard Energy had agreed to a settlement entailing their switching from coal as a feedstock for its planned coal/biomass-to-liquids Ohio River Clean Fuels plant ([earlier post](#)) to natural gas.

In November 2008, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency issued the third and final state environmental necessary to the Ohio River Clean Fuels (ORCF) project. The US Army Corp of Engineers had also issued the only federal permit required for the project. Baard Energy was then to proceed into final design and construction of the 53,000 barrel per day Coal/Biomass to Liquids plant (CBTL) at the Columbiana County Port Authority site in Wellsville, Ohio. ([Earlier post.](#))

The Baard project originally proposed co-feeding the gasifiers with 30% biomass and 70% coal, and to capture up to 85% of CO₂. Baard said ORCF was developing plans to compress the CO₂ into liquid form and transport it to the neighboring oil fields in Eastern Ohio for Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR).

NRDC and the Sierra Club quickly appealed the issuing of the environmental permits by Ohio EPA and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Sierra Club and NRDC raised issues about the air pollution, water discharges, and global warming pollution associated with the plant.

In March 2009, Baard Energy CEO John Baardson [announced](#) that company directors decided they would no longer pursue an application with the US Department of Energy's (DOE) Loan Guarantee Program for ORCF. According to Mr. Baardson at that time, the company learned that the NRDC and Sierra Club legal challenges against permits issued by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the US Army Corps of Engineers would likely delay for years any funding from a DOE guarantee.

The DOE had made it known to Baard that lawsuits challenging environmental permits will be considered part of the risk evaluation of a project and may have an impact on various cost penalties and when the project would receive funding. Therefore, what should have been an advantage, having the necessary permits which demonstrate the project is shovel-ready, ended up jeopardizing the project because of these lawsuits, the company said then.

In its statement, the NRDC said that Beard Energy and the State of Ohio settled what turned into a multi-year long permit fight by agreeing to cease efforts to turn coal into liquid fuels. Beard plans instead to move to natural gas, eliminating more than 75% of the greenhouse gases that would have been associated with the project, as well as the associated criteria pollutants. In addition, NRDC pointed out, the change closes what would have been a new market for Ohio's highly sulfurous coal.

Ohio EPA was also a party to the settlement, which was filed with the Ohio Environmental Review Appeals Commission on Friday. Pursuant to the agreement, NRDC and Sierra Club are moving to stay their pending legal challenges to the permits for Beard's proposed coal-to-liquids facility while Beard and Ohio EPA work to modify those permits to remove coal as a feedstock and reflect the resulting emissions reductions. Assuming the modified permits reflect the agreement being filed today, NRDC and Sierra Club will then move to dismiss their appeals once the permits are modified.

While we do not support the new refinery plan and believe it is unnecessary no matter what feedstock it use, this is a giant blow to coal in Ohio and the nation. We will continue to take on dirty coal plants in the Buckeye state and around the country.

—Sierra Club's Nachy Kanfer