

OPINION

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Eugene group helps turn the tide against coal

By BERN JOHNSON
For The Register-Guard

The Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide is working with partners around the world to take a critical step toward protecting the climate: Stopping the burning of coal.

Coal is a dirty, outdated fuel. To protect our global climate, we must keep coal in the ground. As The New York Times reported on Aug. 6, "Coal is the world's biggest source of carbon emissions by far and the leading culprit in global warming."

In the U.S., coal consumption is dropping. Oregon has one coal-fired power plant — Portland General Electric's Boardman plant — and it will stop burning coal by the end of 2020.

While some countries have moved past coal, in others utilities and coal companies are pushing hard to burn more coal. In the Philippines, 23 coal-fired power plants are in the pipeline. The Medupi plant that recently opened in South Africa is roughly eight times as big as Oregon's Boardman plant. In India, more than 400 new coal-fired power plants are planned. Building all these coal-fired power plants would devastate air quality and the global climate.

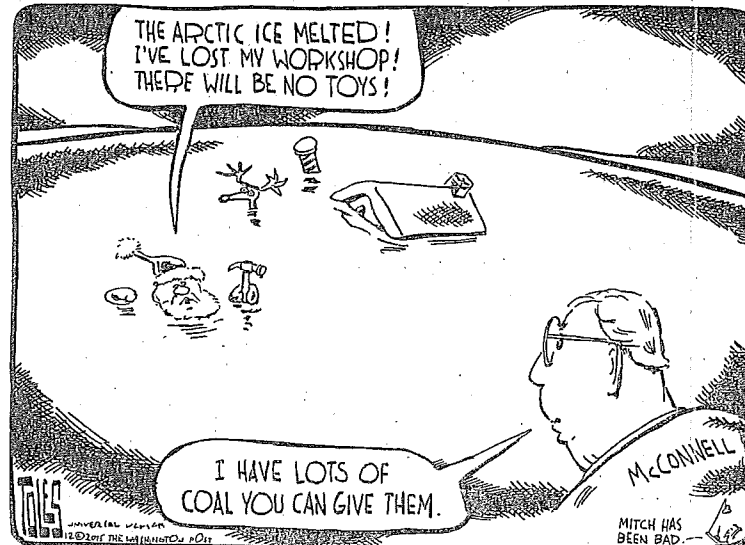
At ELAW, we form partnerships with local lawyers who are working to persuade their

home countries to move past coal and embrace sustainable energy solutions. These public interest advocates are working with communities, agencies, and courts to challenge plans to build more coal-fired power plants and mine more coal. To move past coal, we must win these local battles.

ELAW's team of lawyers and scientists helps local advocates make the case against coal and promote cleaner energy sources. ELAW staff scientist Mark Cherniack, Ph.D., is a biochemist who helps local advocates build the scientific case against burning more coal. ELAW staff attorney Jennifer Gleason taught energy law at the University of Oregon School of Law for 10 years and helps craft model policies to reduce reliance on coal and promote renewables.

Around the world, local advocates are battling to turn the tide against coal:

Robyn Hugo, head of the Pollution and Climate Change Programme at the Centre for Environmental Rights in South Africa, says: "Despite our climate change commitments and notwithstanding decisive action taken elsewhere in the world to move away from coal, South Africa intends to procure another 2,500 megawatts of electricity from independent power producers.



"ELAW's expertise is invaluable in our fight — on behalf of affected communities — against these new coal-fired power stations."

Right now, ELAW partners in South Africa are developing legal strategies to stop the rampant spread of coal mining in the province of Mpumalanga, which is the source of a large proportion of South Africa's fresh water and is where almost half of the country's most productive agricultural land is situated.

Indian lawyers convinced India's National Green Tribunal to block plans for a huge proposed

coal plant complex on the coast in the province of Tamil Nadu. The developers failed to consider the impacts of building a power plant in an area already plagued by air pollution.

In the Philippines, local advocates in Cebu helped convince government officials to deny permission to dump coal ash on beachfront property in a floodplain.

These victories come at a critical time in the battle against coal. The cost of sustainable energy sources is dropping fast, yet coal companies and some utilities are pushing to fast track construction of more coal fired

power plants.

Building coal plants now will lock us into years of mining and burning coal, with devastating impacts on air quality and the climate. If we can expose the true costs of outdated coal and hold off construction of new coal plants, other energy sources will make coal obsolete.

ELAW has helped partners in more than 20 countries take on coal and lawyers from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Kenya, India and the Philippines have called on us recently for urgent help challenging coal.

We want to help these courageous advocates move their countries past coal and protect our global climate.

Defeating even a single coal-fired power plant can yield substantial benefits — according to the Environmental Protection Agency, closing Oregon's Boardman plant will yield benefits comparable to removing 650,000 passenger vehicles from the road.

Every time a community rejects coal and chooses renewable energy, it helps clear the air and moves us closer to solving our global climate crisis.

Bern Johnson of Eugene is the executive director of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (www.elaw.org).