



NEXT UP

Guest editorial | Why should you care about \$100k Club?

The following editorial appeared on PennLive.com. It does not necessarily refle...

Rachel Gleason | A timely reminder of the essential value of coal power

By Rachel Gleason

www.betterwithcoal.com Feb 15, 2019



Rachel Gleason

Pennsylvanians are keenly aware that the state's weather can be unforgiving.

The nation's latest turn with the polar vortex was a reminder of just how unforgiving it can be, both in the commonwealth and around most of the country. With temperatures dipping well-below zero in most regions, our energy systems, particularly the electricity grid, were pushed to the limit.

Once again, coal power plants came to the rescue to ensure the lights stayed on and our heating systems kept us comfortable.

The shift away from coal to other fuels in the past few years has raised red flags that both Pennsylvania and the United States may be trading inexpensive, reliable and secure energy for an altogether less reliable and affordable future. While the warning signs are ever present, extreme cold can make the weaknesses now spreading through our energy system painfully obvious.

Increased reliance on renewable sources of energy that are dependent on the vagaries of the weather, and an over-reliance on natural gas plants that are susceptible to an absence of supply and fuel delivery setbacks, are reasons for deep concern.

In the upper Midwest, the bitter cold forced operators to power down wind turbines as frigid temperatures caused ice to build up on turbine blades. In Michigan, a fire at a natural gas compressor station prompted the governor to beg consumers to reduce natural gas usage, fearing supplies would be unable to meet demand on the coldest day of the year.

The electrical grid was able to pull through last month, despite these tight supply problems. Coal-fired power plants, which typically have months of fuel stored on site, were able to quickly ramp up their generation.

In the PJM Interconnection, which supplies electricity to 65 million people, including all of Pennsylvania, coal consistently outpaced all other fuel sources and provided nearly 40 percent of the electricity needed throughout the coldest 72-hour period between Jan. 30 and Feb. 1. On a normal day, coal supplies about 30 percent of the PJM grid's power needs.

This was not the first time our coal plants have stepped up when other sources of energy could not, and it is not expected to be the last.

During the "Bomb Cyclone" that hit the eastern U.S. in January 2018, the majority of the electricity generated was provided by coal plants. Not only was coal able pick up the slack, issues with natural gas pipeline capacity meant those plants had to do so. With home heating demand for natural gas soaring during this time, the supply needed to produce electricity was simply unable to keep up with demand. Half of the grid's total natural gas capacity was not available to meet peak power needs on Jan. 7, 2018.

A final point goes to the fluid nature of recent past, present and future of energy production. The World Bank predicts that the cost of natural gas will increase by 50 percent in the next 10 years, which has the potential to disrupt pricing and availability structures.

The factor that remains the same in that equation is the expectation of consumers and businesses that their access to reliable and affordable electricity will be there at the flip of a switch. Coal-fired power plants equipped with the most advanced air emission control technology available are the workhorses that can provide those assurances.

These bouts with extreme cold are a timely reminder of the value of a balanced electricity mix and the need for our coal power plants. But that balance is slipping away as coal plants are forced into early

retirement due to markets that are favoring one fuel source over another. In simple terms, we have experienced several recent close calls, and are at increasing risk of having electricity brown outs at the worst possible time.

An all-of-the-above energy strategy should be far more than a slogan. We need all the tools at our disposal to meet the energy challenges ahead.

A future without essential, reliable and affordable coal generation in an environment where consumers demand electricity at all times is a recipe for disaster.

Rachel Gleason is executive director of Pennsylvania Coal Alliance in Harrisburg.

Tags

- Electricity
- Power Plant
- Energy
- Commerce
- Economics
- Natural Gas
- Plant
- Fuel
- Technology

0 comments



Sign in

1 person listening

+ Follow

Post comment as...

Newest | Oldest

COUPON DEALS

NEWSPAPER ADS

- 56 BUFFET
- AMERISERV
- BANTLY
- Blaino Boring & Chocolates
- Chan Soon-Shiong Medical Center at Windber (2)
- Christ Centered Community Church
- Genomough Health System

THIS WEEK'S CIRCULARS

OBITUARIES

D'Angelo, Rose

Carthew, Genevieve

Peter Pikus

George R. Dow

 Dow, George R.

MOST POPULAR

Articles Articles

images

Videos

Commented

- Westmont Hilltop wrestler charged with stealing handgun, suspended by district
- Johnstown high school basketball player charged with assaulting teen
- Somerset County couple jailed after police find meth lab ingredients
- Authorities seize meth lab products
- Galleria owner: Mall not closing, hasn't been sold
- Police release images of men involved in Dairy Queen heist
- PHOTO GALLERY | Johnstown wins District 6 title in overtime thriller
- Former Johnstown police detective enters guilty plea, sentenced to probation
- Gallagher to open for Swindell at 1st Summit Arena
- 'An empty space in our hearts': Dougherty gave late abuse victim's picture to Vatican committee

MONSTER

CNAs and LPNs
Maple Winds Care Center
Portage, 15946

☐ 03/04/2019

multimedia account executives
The Tribune- Democrat
Johnstown, 15901

☐ 03/04/2019

In the Spotlight

***First Amendment:** Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

**CONTACT
INFORMATION**

TribDem.com
425 Locust Street
Johnstown, PA 15901
Phone: (814) 532-5000
Email: tribdem@tribdem.com

SERVICES

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Advertise with Us
- Personnel
- Subscriber Services
- Submission Forms
- Advertiser Index

SECTIONS

-
- Local News
- Sports
- Community
- Local Columnists
- Obituaries
- Photos
- Video Gallery
- Weather
- Homes



RENOWNED AND RENEWED

Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Alabama's
RTJ Golf Trail with Unlimited Golf this Spring
starting at \$132.

