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Wyman compromise

Thursday, June 21, 2001

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Three years of extensive debate and negotiation over a tiny (but expensive) fraction of the pollution coming out of FPL's Wyman Station power plant resulted in May in a compromise FPL, environmentalists and state regulators say they are happy to support. A final vote on the issue by the Board of Environmental Protection, scheduled for today in Augusta, should end the debate and demonstrate that sometimes, after a lot of arguing, reasonable people can find reasonable agreement.

The pollutant in question is nitrogen oxide, which Wyman Station in Yarmouth, like almost all oil-fired power plants, produces in abundance. Nitrogen oxide is an irritant to eyes and lungs and a major contributor to ground-level ozone. The agreement, when fully in place in 2005, is expected to reduce the amount of NOx by about 800 tons annually. Much of that cut, however, was already agreed to by all sides; the question was over choosing the better way to reduce the final 20 percent, and both the board and the staff at the Department of Environmental Protection wavered on whether the method chosen by FPL had an appreciable difference over that preferred by environmentalists.

FPL wanted to trade credits with upwind power plants — to pay those plants to reduce the amount of nitrogen oxide they were spewing toward Maine. The Natural Resources Council of Maine wanted the all the reduction to come at the plant itself, using technology that would have added an estimated \$40 million to FPL's costs. The compromise has FPL giving up its trading plan and the NRCM agreeing to a technology that doesn't quite produce the same reductions but costs a lot less, approximately \$12 million to \$15 million.

The board should support this compromise, not only because it took years to reach but because the alternatives appear to be so marginally different that Maine would be unlikely to notice any additional benefit and the already lengthy timetable for reaching the reductions could be pushed back even further. Also, it is nice when a power company and an environmental group agree on something.

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