

Union College

Union | Digital Works

2019 Op-Eds

Environmental and Natural Resource
Economics (ECO 228)

5-31-2019

Astoria is tired of nickname: "Asthma Alley"and Is calling for Clean Electricity

Sajju Chalise

Union College - Schenectady, NY, chalises@union.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalworks.union.edu/eco228_2019

Recommended Citation

Chalise, Sajju, "Astoria is tired of nickname: "Asthma Alley"and Is calling for Clean Electricity" (2019). *2019 Op-Eds*. 9.

https://digitalworks.union.edu/eco228_2019/9

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Environmental and Natural Resource Economics (ECO 228) at Union | Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2019 Op-Eds by an authorized administrator of Union | Digital Works. For more information, please contact digitalworks@union.edu.

Astoria is tired of nickname: “Asthma Alley” and Is calling for Clean Electricity

Sajju, Chalise

05/31/2019

As summer arrives every year, the most awaited day, the 4th of July brings friends and families together to either parks or backyards for a barbeque cook-off. Besides inhaling the juicy smell of BBQ as it is being prepared, the residents of Astoria in Queens, New York, also inhale polluted air released from an oil burning power station, nearby. According to HuffPost, Ravenswood Generating Station and The Astoria Generating Station located in northwestern Queens provides nearly half the city’s electricity by burning number 6 fuel oil, which is considered one of the most polluting energy sources in the world. The city council passed a law in 2015 that requires the power stations in the city to eliminate number 6 and number 4 fuel oils by 2020 and 2030, respectively, due to the serious health risks associated with these oils.

According to the New York City Department of Health, Astoria has higher air pollution levels than the rest of the borough or city. The power generating plants have been in this location for many decades and numerous residents and local government officials believe that these old plants are culprits of poor air quality in Astoria. According to HuffPost, Astoria Generation plant burns 3,039,000 gallons of No. 6 fuel oil a year and Ravenswood Generating Station burns 3,264,000 gallons per year and was ranked the largest carbon polluter statewide in 2014. The community health report for the neighborhood showed the dangerous air pollutant, PM2.5 is found to be 8.9 micrograms per cubic meter compared to 8.6 citywide. As of result of the pollution, individuals living near the area suffer the most consequences from the burning plant. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that residents of Astoria have higher asthma rates, hospitalization, and ER visits than average Queen's residents. Hence, residents pay higher medical bills and overall have poorer quality of life.

According to the Queens’ Time-Ledger, it took eight years of protest and political pressure to permanently close the Charles Poletti Power Plant in Astoria in 2011. The plant operated for 33

years, produced 60 percent of the city's electricity and was the worst polluter in the city. Because of this plant, northwestern Queens acquired the name, "Asthma Alley." However, today, Astoria is tired of the nickname "Asthma Alley." The immigrant neighborhood of Astoria has the right to breathe clean air.

It is not ideal to close the plant or even eliminate fuel oils such as number 6 or 4 to produce electricity right away. New York City needs to protest or pressure the politicians to pass laws to use renewable energy to produce 100 percent clean electricity by 2030. The energy burden of Queens could increase since the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant is closing by 2021, which provides New York City with up to 30 percent of its energy. This is the right time to advocate and pressure our politicians to generate clean electricity. It is in the hands of voters and policy-makers to favor renewable energy because they are the ones that can create environmentally friendly policies. It is cheaper to set up fossil fuel power plants, but they have higher overall environmental damage compared to renewable sources.

The shift to clean electricity must be gradual. Today, New York City uses slightly more than five percent of renewable energy sources to generate electricity but by 2030, NYC should completely switch to green alternative energy choices such as photovoltaic panels, offshore wind farms, and hydro plants. The field of renewable energy is relatively new, and it would be difficult for utility companies to drastically change to renewable sources because it would be difficult to produce mass renewable technology to sustain more than 8 million people in New York City in such short period of time. As renewable technologies advance, efficient photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, batteries, will be introduced in the market which will increase quantity of production. The investment in renewable energy will increase the cost of electricity but will considerably reduce air pollution, asthma rates, hospital and ER visits. It can be beneficial to consumers, producers, utility companies and most importantly the environment. Similarly, it will significantly increase the quality of life of the residence. The demand for electricity is expected to rise in the near future as population and urbanization increase. In order to save our planet and our health let

us wave our farewells to fossil fuels and introduce green energy to produce electricity.

As the fourth of July is right around the corner, let's enjoy the BBQ and advocate for renewable energy in New York City because WE THE PEOPLE are the change makers.