

PREVENTING NEW FOSSIL FUEL INFRASTRUCTURE

Matt Allenbaugh // Appalachian Voices // matt.allenbaugh@appvoices.org
Corrina Beall // Sierra Club Virginia Chapter // corrina.beall@sierraclub.org
Elizabeth Putfark // Southern Environmental Law Center // eputfark@sclc.org
Melissa Thomas // Climate Equity Working Group // mthomas@virginia-organizing.org

WHY IT MATTERS

Virginia is facing an unprecedented buildout of new methane gas infrastructure. Gas-fired power plants, along with the pipelines and compressor stations they require, emit pollutants that harm public health, degrade natural resources, and accelerate climate change.

Burning gas releases toxic pollutants like nitrogen oxides, ozone, and fine **particulate matter (PM2.5)**. PM2.5 has no safe exposure level and causes cardiovascular damage and premature death. Public health experts estimated PM2.5 emissions from a single new gas plant in Virginia could cost \$27 million annually in health damages.

Gas plants also disrupt local landscapes with constant noise, local water consumption, and new substations, pipelines, and compressor stations.

Methane is more expensive than renewables like solar and energy storage, which are able to provide cleaner, cheaper, faster-to-deploy energy in Virginia. Additionally, the price of new turbines is at an all time high, and it's expected to keep climbing. Meanwhile, fuel prices remain volatile. A single winter storm cost Dominion ratepayers about \$8 a month for more than \$1 billion in unplanned fuel costs.

Despite these impacts, utilities are racing to build new fossil fuel resources in Virginia. This buildout poses significant threats to Virginians. Gas power plants mean higher bills, as fuel costs, which are passed entirely onto customers, are susceptible to price spikes and volatile global markets. They also would lock the Commonwealth into another generation of lower air quality, worse health outcomes, continued greenhouse gas emissions, and strained water supplies. Unless permitting regulations change, the impacts of new fossil fuel infrastructure are most likely to fall disproportionately on low-income households and communities of color.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Virginia committed to a clean energy transition in the 2020 **Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA)**, setting a retirement date of 2050 for fossil fuel plants in Dominion and Appalachian Power Company and requiring utilities to invest ambitiously in clean energy and energy efficiency. Virginia also committed to protecting environmental justice communities from high-polluting infrastructure, long concentrated in Black, Brown, and low-income Virginia communities.

Despite state mandates, Dominion Energy is moving forward with plans for significant new gas-fired power generation—a choice that benefits shareholders while harming our environment, communities, and ratepayers.

Third party developers, as well as utilities, are rushing to cash in on data center demand with myriad new fossil fuel projects. Three large methane gas plants are under development in Chesterfield, Fluvanna, and Cumberland counties that will negatively impact air quality across more than 20 counties, and as far away as Virginia Beach. All three would impact

the James River, with the proposed Tenaska plant in Fluvanna County draining 6-7 million gallons from it daily, and Dominion's Cumberland plant pulling 800,000 gallons per day from the Cobb Creek Reservoir. At 3 gigawatts, Dominion's proposed plant in Cumberland County would be the second largest gas plant in the country.

Four massive methane gas transmission pipeline projects, **Southeast Supply Enhancement Project**, **MVP Southgate**, **Power Express**, and a 48.5 mile pipeline in Accomack Co., are proposed or under construction (see *Preventing Pipeline Harm*, page 117). In Chesapeake and Southwest Virginia, pipeline **compressor stations** are proposed to be located in overburdened **environmental justice communities**, including the **Swann Compressor Station** in Montgomery County and Chesapeake Compressor Station Project in Hampton Roads.

The Swann Compressor Station proposed by **Mountain Valley Pipeline** would operate in a low-income community already exposed to pollution from Interstate 81, Highway 460, and the Norfolk Southern Railroad, which rattles through with train cars full of uncovered coal.

OPPORTUNITIES

Modelling has shown that Virginia does not need more methane gas plants to maintain a reliable grid—even if all projected data center demand materializes. Given the rising costs of gas—to our wallets, our health, and our resources—Virginia should press pause on the flurry of gas proposals in development and recommit to the clean energy transition that is already codified into law.

Utilities must begin by prioritizing deployment and procurement of clean energy resources like solar and storage, which are faster and cheaper to build than gas. They should also be held accountable when they fail to meet their energy efficiency targets. Dominion has failed to meet its targets every year since they were set, achieving less than half the required level in both 2023 and 2024 (see *Energy Efficiency is Energy Affordability*, page 103). Those targets exist not only to help customers manage their bills, but also to lower peak demand and avoid the need for costly new infrastructure, like the Chesterfield gas peaker plant. Finally, when new energy infrastructure must be sited, communities should be protected from bearing a disproportionate share of environmental impacts, as the Virginia Environmental Justice Act requires.

A just energy transition can do more than prevent harm. It can deliver high-quality, family-sustaining jobs, workforce training, and new opportunities for Virginia communities. Since the passage of the VCEA, clean energy jobs have grown more than three times faster than overall employment and now support over 118,000 workers statewide. Scaling solar, batteries, and energy efficiency helps stabilize local economies, reduce emissions, and ensure that no community is left behind.

PREVENTING NEW FOSSIL FUEL INFRASTRUCTURE

Matt Allenbaugh // Appalachian Voices // matt.allenbaugh@appvoices.org
Corrina Beall // Sierra Club Virginia Chapter // corrina.beall@sierraclub.org
Elizabeth Putfark // Southern Environmental Law Center // eputfark@selc.org
Melissa Thomas // Climate Equity Working Group // mthomas@virginia-organizing.org

TOP TAKEAWAYS

The proposed buildout of new gas infrastructure would accelerate climate change, raise bills, harm health, and lower Virginians' quality of life.

Cleaner, cheaper, faster-to-deploy resources like solar, storage, and demand-side management can meet rising demand in the Commonwealth without the need for new gas plants.

Cumulative pollution impact assessments before approval of new gas infrastructure would help to ensure no community bears compounding impacts of pollution.

ENDNOTES

1. *Priority climate action plan*. (2023, March). Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-03/commonwealth-of-virginia-priority-climate-action-plan.pdf
2. Ozone. (2025, June 9). American Lung Association. <https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/what-makes-air-unhealthy/ozone>
3. *Integrated Science Assessment (ISA) for Particulate Matter (Final Report)*. (2019, December). U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. <https://assessments.epa.gov/isa/document/&deid=347534#downloads>
4. Dominici F, Schwartz J, Di Q, Braun D, Choirat C, & Zanobetti A. (2019). *Assessing Adverse Health Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Low Levels of Ambient Air Pollution: Phase I*. 200 Res Rep Health Eff Inst. 1-51. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7300216/>
5. Dominici, F. (2025). *Report: Balico proposal impact analysis*. SELC. <https://www.sclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025.04.12-Public-Health-Impacts-Analysis-Balico-Gas-Plant-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>
6. Cork, M., Gianluca, G., Dominici, F. (2025). *Report: PM2.5 air pollution impact of proposed Expedition Generating Station*. <https://www.pecva.org/wp-content/uploads/Fluvanna-Health-and-Air-Quality-Impacts-of-the-Proposed-Expedition-Generating-Station.pdf>
7. Wittenberg, A. (2026). *A Data Center opened next door. Then came the high pitched whine*. Politico. <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/11/data-centers-ai-electricity-virginia-00815219>
8. *Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis, Version 18.0*. (2026). Lazard. <https://www.lazard.com/media/5t1bhyla/lazards-lcoeplus-june-2025-vf.pdf>
9. *The new reality of power generation: an analysis of increasing gas turbine costs in the US*. (2025). GridLab, Energy Futures Group & Halcyon. <https://gridlab.org/portfolio-item/gas-turbine-cost-report/>
10. *Direct Testimony of Albert Lin*. (2025, July 16). Virginia Electric and Power Company — To revise its fuel factor pursuant to VA Code § 56-249.6. PUR-2025-00059. <https://www.scc.virginia.gov/docketsearch/DOCS/86t%2301!.PDF>
11. *Petition of Virginia Electric and Power Company for a financing order authorizing the issuance of deferred fuel cost bonds pursuant to Va. Code § 56-249.6:2. PUR-2026-00078*. (2026, May 29) <https://www.scc.virginia.gov/docketsearch/DOCS/8c%24%2301!.PDF>
12. Main, I. (2022). *Your electric bills are skyrocketing. Blame our failure to invest in renewable energy*. Virginia Mercury. <https://virginiamercury.com/2022/07/19/your-electric-bills-are-skyrocketing-blame-our-failure-to-invest-in-renewable-energy/>
13. *Environmental Justice Study*. (2020). Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/8624/637727534058630000>
14. Virginia Clean Economy Act, HB 1526 Virginia General Assembly, Reg. Sess. (2020). <https://legiscan.com/VA/bill/HB1526/2020>
15. Generation of electricity from renewable and zero carbon sources, Va. Code §§ 56-585.5 B; 56-596.2. <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title56/chapter23/section56-585.5/>
16. Virginia Environmental Justice Act; Environmental Justice Study. Va. Acts, ch. 1212 (2020). Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/8624/637727534058630000>
17. *Methane gas is bad for the South*. (2026). SELC. <https://www.sclc.org/topic/methane-gas-threatens-southern-people-and-places/>
18. *Dirty, expensive, unnecessary: deny Chesterfield gas plant permits*. (July 31, 2025). SELC. <https://www.sclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Dirty-Unnecessary-Expensive-Factsheet-July-31-2025.pdf>
19. Tessum C. (2025). *Disproportionate Impacts of Proposed Emissions from the Chesterfield Gas Plant*. SELC. <https://www.sclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/TESSUM-FINAL-REPORT-DISPROPORTIONATE-IMPACTS-OCTOBER-2025.pdf>
20. Cork, M., Gianluca, G., Dominici, F. *Report: PM2.5 air pollution impact of proposed Expedition Generating Station*. (2024). Electric Utilities. American Lung Association. <https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/what-makes-air-unhealthy/electric-utilities>
21. Nuechterlein, K. (2025). *Proposal for \$2 billion natural gas-fired plant in Fluvanna faces pushback from neighbors*. 29 News. <https://www.29news.com/2025/09/23/proposal-2-billion-natural-gas-fired-plant-fluvanna-faces-pushback-neighbors/>
22. *Conditional Use Permit Application: Cumberland Energy Center Project*. (2026, June 26). County of Cumberland, Virginia <https://www.cumberlandcountyvirginia.gov/343/Cumberland-Energy-Center-Project>
23. Glass, M. (2026). *Cumberland County residents fired up over potential new gas plant*. WWBT. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/politics/government/cumberland-county-residents-fired-up-over-potential-new-gas-plant/ar-AA21BnD9>
24. *Electricity explained: electricity generation, capacity, and sales in the United States*. (2023, Oct. 26). U.S. Energy Information Administration. <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/electricity/electricity-in-the-us-top-10.php>
25. *2022 LAFAYETTE AREA HOUSEHOLD SURVEY*. (2025, November 30). Virginia Tech Appalachian Studies. <https://sites.google.com/vt.edu/2022lafayettecommunitysurvey/home>
26. Busse, M. (2025). *Then & now: Mountain Valley Pipeline moves ahead with Montgomery County Compressor Station*. Cardinal News. <https://cardinalnews.org/2025/12/19/then-now-mountain-valley-pipeline-moves-ahead-with-montgomery-county-compressor-station/>
27. Hafner, K. (2025). *Chesapeake residents continue to fight proposed natural gas facility*. WHRO. <https://www.whro.org/environment/2025-08-15/chesapeake-residents-continue-to-fight-proposed-natural-gas-facility>