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CONVERSION OF VEPCO'S YORKTOWN POWER STATION FROM OIL TO COAL FACES PROBLEMS

The York County Zoning Ordinances require that a conditional use permit be acquired before hauling or storing coal or fly ash. VEPCO applied for this permit nearly a year ago for its Yorktown plant but to date the County Planning Commission has refused to make a favorable recommendation on the application. Other state permits hinge upon issuance of the conditional use permit.

VEPCO has applied to the State Water Control Board for a permit which would permit leachate pond effluent to enter Chisman Creek in York County. The County is particularly concerned with the introduction of heavy metals known to be contained in ash waste into the marine ecosystem, and in fact, seeks to have treatment facilities keep them out of the creek entirely. VEPCO is resisting any treatment requirement. The County believes that any additional pollution of the creek is totally unacceptable.

The background for this situation must be viewed in light of the facility's history. Units 1 and 2 at Yorktown burned coal in the late 1960s with little air pollution control. VEPCO was indicted on criminal nuisance charges in the York County Circuit Court for the operation of the units. A consent decree was entered in 1972, which prohibited the utility from burning coal in these two units. If conversion back to coal is to take place, this consent decree must be modified. Additionally, fly ash contributed to the pollution of Chisman Creek in the county and to the pollution of residential wells. The problem of fly ash disposal and its potential for causing more pollution of the County's water resources and wetlands is a principal concern of county officials.

County officials and residents are also concerned about the location of a site for the land disposal of the fly ash. A 100 acre site is under consideration to hold the ash from units 1 and 2. Unit 3 at Yorktown, which has a capacity of more than twice that of units 1 and 2 combined, presently burns oil. If unit 3 is converted to coal, much more land will be required for a disposal site.

In addition to these technical problems much ill-will exists between the County and VEPCO. This relates in part to the past operation of the plant. It also is fortified by the County's belief that VEPCO has not been supplying it with the same information and proposals that VEPCO has given the state agencies. This enmity must be set aside if the parties are to work out agreements on their technical and scientific differences. It seems that the County is operating from a position of strength in this regard because they have the Court's consent decree to fall back upon if negotiations fall through.

A.B.