

Puerto Rican Protesters Block Waste Dump and Attacked by Police



San Juan, August 3 (RHC)-- A protest in Puerto Rico's southern region blocked the entrance to the EC Waste facility in an attempt to prevent Applied Energy Systems company trucks from dumping coal deposits authorized by the Puerto Rican government.

As the trucks made their way to Peñuelas, dozens of protesters laid down and blocked the entrance to the facility. The police quickly moved in, reportedly beating up protesters and making several arrests.

A number of demonstrators stated that police became particularly aggressive toward women protesters. "The attitude that the police took was ... very hostile the whole time. It is very frustrating," added a resident of Seboruco. Demonstrator Jannette Albino has filed a lawsuit against one officer who she says physically harassed her and threw her to the ground.

The group, which including residents with cancer, was protesting the company's use of the storage unit to hold industrial waste, which residents state is a serious health risk to Puerto Ricans on the island.

"Where are the senators and representatives who say they 'regret' being fooled? You are also responsible for what is happening. We pray to God no tragedy occurs."

The cycle of protests and arrests have been ongoing since last year as community members and social movement leaders, like Oscar Lopez Rivera, join forces against the Fortune 500 company, which claims the coal waste deposits are beneficial for the environment.

The production of coal waste has caused serious health issues for the people in the area and many accuse the government of collusion in a deal made by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Puerto Rico Electric and Power Authority where a clause in AES's contract prohibiting coal ash dumping on the island was removed.

Consequently, the company has saved millions of dollars by putting their toxic waste in public landfills, to the detriment of people's health. Many citizens report respiratory problems and boost in cancer rates as a result.

Meanwhile, EC Waste spokesperson Ricardo Soto said his company claims to be active in "promoting the beneficial use and safe disposal of coal-fired waste and its by-products in sanitary landfill systems."

AES president Manuel Mata stated Tuesday dumping will continue and the company will support the manufacturing industry with the solidification of its liquid waste, despite protesters' complaints.

"Here suffering while watching the comrades on the ground, several of them with cancer."

"In addition, we will continue collaborating with all efforts of the Government to extend the uses of by-products and aggregates in the manufacture of goods for export and construction materials," he added.

The director of the Caribbean Division of the Environmental Protection Agency Carmen Guerrero said that her agency "has not identified imminent health risk for the citizens of Peñuelas After the use of the product in the landfill."

A petition filed by the Health, Development and Environment Committee of Tallaboa last month against EC Waste, Truckers Inc., Peñuelas Valley Landfill, Environmental Quality Board, and AES Puerto Rico documented the environmental damage of the waste, but the claim was overruled by a judge on July 17th in favor of the AES coal plant.

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