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WA State Department
of Ecology (SWRO)

Daniel A. Hannon
634 S.E. 52nd Ave.
Portland, OR 97215

Rich Doenges
NWIW SSEIS Dept. of Ecology
P.O. Box 47775 Olympia, WA 98504-7775

I have been reading about the proposed methanol plant that may be built in Kalama, WA. My understanding is that this facility will be processing fracked natural gas, to be made into methanol which would then be shipped to China, where it would be used in the manufacture of plastics. I do not think this is a good plan for several reasons:

1. The source of the natural gas—fracking—is a major concern. The chemicals used in fracking are toxic, and once they go down into the ground they are irretrievable. This means they could be contaminating groundwater into the distant future. Capped wells also leak methane-- a compound that traps forty times more heat than CO2. I believe we have a responsibility to discourage fracking.
2. The CO2 generated by the trains that bring the fracked natural gas to Kalama must be taken into account, although it doesn't show up in the articles I have read. The CO2 generated by the ships that take the methanol to Asia is another factor that needs to be considered, along with the CO2 used in the plant's construction.
3. I imagine jobs for the people of Kalama will be a big issue, and Northwest Innovation Works, which is proposing this methanol plant, will no doubt be pitching the job issue to county officials and the Kalama Chamber of Commerce. There is a short-term appeal to new jobs, but many of the jobs are likely to go to outside people with the skills needed to build a complicated processing plant. In the long run, the local people are likely to suffer the higher rates of cancer and other diseases that many people in Louisiana suffer who live near petroleum processing plants. Those who make the real money will be far away from the Kalama site.
4. The Columbia River itself also has to be considered, and it is of interest to Oregonians as well as Washingtonians, since it borders both states. By the time it reaches Kalama, it has been dammed fourteen times. It takes in the treated sewage of many towns and cities. It takes in the effluents from paper mills, farms and streets from hundreds of towns and cities in the greater Columbia River watershed. Yet the lower Columbia River is still a prime area for wildlife. How will this methanol plant affect the last portion of the river?
5. Finally, I just heard that China has pledged to have a carbon-neutral economy by 2060. That is admirable, especially since the USA has made no such pledge. However, the carbon a country generates outside of its own borders does not count, so China would be "farming out" its carbon emissions to our country, and this puts us in a position similar to that of many "developing" nations, doing the developed world's dirty work.

Daniel A. Hannon