

Council looks to cut power at plant

Health concerns cited despite emissions agreement

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Alexandria continues to study how to force the closure of Mirant's Potomac River Power Plant, despite the company's recent agreement with a state agency to reduce its pollution emissions.

The city council plans to discuss a course of action during a closed session at an upcoming meeting, Mayor William D. Euille said Friday. The city is looking into the possibility of shutting down the plant through legislation in the 2005 General Assembly session, lawsuits or the revocation of two special-use permits, he said.

The city will "determine what's the proper course of action to take to ensure that the neighborhood and city would be safer," Euille said.

Last week Atlanta-based power provider Mirant Corp. reached a settlement with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Justice to reduce its nitrogen oxide emissions in the region by 65 percent over a seven-year period.

The agreement applies to

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the energy company's three Maryland plants and the Potomac River Power Plant at 132 N. Royal St. in Alexandria. Mirant agreed to the changes in response to a notice of violation issued by DEQ in 2003.

"The [nitrogen oxide] agreement will provide an exponentially greater reduction in NOx emission than would be

the case if the plant closed," said Steven Arabia, a Mirant spokesman. "... By expanding to include our Maryland plants, we are able to apply significantly greater reductions."

The nitrogen oxide emissions controls will cost more than \$10 million, Arabia said. The company also will spend \$1 million on machinery that controls dust and particulate matter at the Potomac River plant, he said.

The agreement was touted by DEQ and tentatively supported by U.S. Rep. James P. Moran, D-8th. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Texas still must approve the decision.

The company already is in bankruptcy proceedings.

Alexandria City Council members and staff need time to evaluate the changes, Euille said. They also want to receive feedback from city residents who have complained about the plant's pollution in the past.

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