

# Bow: Less Than 50 Days Coal Supply Explained

By BARBARA JOHNSON  
Monitor Correspondent

BOW — While Southern Power Co. of Georgia boasted yesterday that it had an 127-day supply of coal stockpiled since last April, Public Service Co. of N.H. announced its Merrimack Station had less than a 50-day supply.

Questioned on the disparity, PSC officials blamed the railroads, the inability to purchase coal on a spot basis because of consumer advocate objections, wildcat strikes by the West Virginia mine tied to a PSC contract and consumers themselves.

Harry Rollins, operating supervisor of the Merrimack Station on River Road, Bow, said that the plant's stockpile is flexible, varying from 50- to 60-day backlogs, depending on the availability of coal.

Rollins estimated a 210,000-ton supply on hand yesterday, including a final delivery due that day.

"If we have no shutdowns," Rollins said, "we technically have a 53-day supply left. But we can't use all the coal we have. We must maintain a coal reserve for emergencies, so we actually have less supply on hand."

Rollins estimated that the plant uses some 4,000 tons of coal per day. Depending how long the strike is on, we'll probably run some reduction. That is, we would reduce power output."

Rollins continued, "We've been trying to get extra coal.

But part of the problem is the availability of coal cars and getting those cars over the rails. The railroads aren't in that good a shape."

Thomas Fowke, steam production superintendent in the Manchester office of PSC, agreed that transportation played a part in the short supply of coal, but blamed the mine output equally.

"We've had a wildcat strike here and there at our supplier, Consolidated Coal, in Loveridge, W. Va., he said. "We tried to deal with other mines, but we were taken to task by consumer advocates because spot buying of coal costs more."

Fowke added that the Bow plant, the only coal-supplied plant in New England, was confined to a particular type of coal, which made spot purchases more difficult.

Norman Cullerot, public information spokesman for PSC, said that his company was ordered before the Federal Power Commission this fall on charges by the Legislative Utilities Consumer Council.

The charges complained of attempts to purchase coal at higher cost from other sources.

"Every year we try to stockpile coal," Cullerot declared, "but a 50-day supply is all we could get. We've never had more, and probably been in a position of less in other years."

The Merrimack Station is a prime source of New England energy, Cullerot continued, "because coal is 30 percent cheaper than oil. Depending on

how severe a winter we experience," he reasoned, "and should the Merrimack plant have to shut down, oil burning would be the only answer. Ultimately, consumers would have to pay the added cost."

"We must evaluate the situation on a daily basis," he continued, "because we don't want to be caught unavailable when needed the most."

Conservation is important, Cullerot said, in a crisis like this. But he blamed consumers for not responding. "About four or five years ago," he recalled, "we announced a program of energy conservation, offering energy consultants for a free inspection of business and residential premises as to proper insulation and heating systems. The industrial and commercial companies responded well. But the residential customers did not."

"It's just like the 55 mph speed limit," he said, "Who obeys it today? And how many residential customers really conserve energy in their homes?" he asked.

Cullerot pointed out that the energy consultant program is still being offered by PSC, and is still available by calling any district or division office.

But the ultimate answer, Cullerot said, lies in the Seabrook power plant. "Then 86 percent of the power in New Hampshire would be nuclear-produced," he said, "60 percent more cheaply than by oil. It would make us energy self-sufficient, in case of a miners' strike or an oil embargo."