

Residents protest ash from Batam power plant

Around 300 residents of Batam, Riau Islands, have rallied to shut down the Tanjung Kasam steam-powered electricity plant (PLTU) until state-owned electricity company PT PLN stops it from pouring ash onto their homes.

The residents of Telaga Punggur subdistrict in Nongsa have complained of respiratory and skin ailments due to ash from the plant since the Tanjung Kasam PLTU started operations at the end of 2012

The 2x55-megawatt (Mw) plant, built by a Chinese contractor, supplies 30 percent of Batam's total power demand of 383 Mw. The plant uses up to 30,000 tons of coal a month to fire its generators.

Residents were stopped by the police as they approached the station's managers on Jan. 2 to demand that the plant be shut down.

A Telaga Punggur neighborhood unit chief, Susanto, said that residents wanted to ask the station's managers to stop off loading coal from a ship berthed nearby using a conveyer belt due to the ensuing dust pollution.

"We have urged a temporary stoppage of operations until a solution regarding our complaint is reached," Susanto said.

He said that the areas around the power station had been covered in coal dust and soot since the plant came on line.

"Besides health disorders, like respiratory and skin ailments, the homes of residents have also been covered in black ash," Susanto said.

Representatives from several neighborhood and community units have said that they attended a meeting with the power station's management, which promised to wash down the coal before it was unloaded so as not to reduce the amount of coal dust falling on the community.

"It turned out that the ash is still there," Susanto said. During the protest on Monday at the entrance of the power station, the residents were seen yelling demands that the management heed their complaints.

Separately, the spokesman of PLN's Batam office, Agus Subekti, confirmed that the management had met with the neighborhood and community units to resolve the issue.

Agus said the coal dust covering the community was from unloading coal and not the plant's operation.

"The coal freighter was unloading coal from the barge and strong winds in the afternoon carried away the ash," Agus said. "The PLTU management then arranged things so that the unloading process would not spew ash."

"We will wash down the coal ahead of the unloading process so as not to cause pollution in the housing complexes. In the future, Tanjung Kasam PLTU will seek to create a safe unloading process. Now, the wind is apparently strong, so it causes dust. Previously, it was okay," Agus said.