

# Five ways Dominion puts profits ahead of Virginians

**Dominion Energy (owner of Virginia Power) is the most politically powerful company in Virginia, where its outsized influence pads its profits at the expense of people, communities and the environment. Dominion is a major emitter of air and climate pollutants and has flexed its political muscle in Richmond to raise utility costs for its customers. Its dirty, coal-fired legacy and shift to a fracked gas future — including the Atlantic Coast Pipeline — will perpetuate pollution and lock Virginia into fossil fuels for decades.**

## 1. Polluting Virginia's environment

Dominion's coal- and fracked gas-fired power plants emit dangerous air pollutants that cause asthma, cancer and heart disease.<sup>1</sup> Dominion's power plants have been significant polluters, and the company has amassed millions of dollars in settlements with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.<sup>2</sup>

Dominion has stored waste from its coal-fired plants in coal ash ponds that can pose widespread health risks from leaching dangerous chemicals.<sup>3</sup> Coal ash facilities are frequently located near communities of color and lower-income areas.<sup>4</sup> Dominion has resisted efforts to make the company clean up its mess, prolonging the toxic coal ash seepage into groundwater.<sup>5</sup> In 2018, Hurricane Florence breached coal ash facilities in North Carolina, bringing new urgency to clean up Dominion's ash ponds as climate change increasingly drives superstorms to the Mid-Atlantic states.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Contributing to climate catastrophe

Dominion is slowly shedding coal-fired power plants but building natural gas-fired power plants, meaning that its total climate emissions have risen steadily.<sup>7</sup> Dominion has only modestly invested in wind and solar power — and mostly outside of Virginia. Dominion's small pilot offshore wind project would be less than 1 percent the size of its massive gas-fired power plant under construction in Greensville County, where African Americans make up three-fifths of the population and where 18 percent of the population lives in poverty.<sup>8</sup> The most vulnerable residents, including low-income populations and communities of color who already suffer from disparate environmental exposures and illnesses, will experience the brunt of climate impacts.<sup>9</sup>



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## 3. Using political power to make people pay

Dominion has paved the way for legislative victories in Richmond with generous campaign contributions (\$10 million since 1998<sup>10</sup>), gifts to legislators and officials (\$430,000 from 2008 to 2016<sup>11</sup>) and sustained lobbying efforts.<sup>12</sup> Dominion has crafted, pushed and helped enact its legislative priorities that have protected its profits and shielded it from accountability for pollution.<sup>13</sup> Dominion-backed utility regulation has repeatedly raised electricity costs for Virginia households.<sup>14</sup> Virginia's utility-friendly regulations — successfully pushed by Dominion's lobbying efforts — encouraged Goldman Sachs to name Virginia as "one of the top state regulatory environments for utilities" in 2017.<sup>15</sup>

## 4. Forging a fracked gas fossil-fueled future

Dominion is now consolidating its utility empire around fracking, the controversial drilling technique that threatens communities with water pollution, air emissions and ecosystem degradation. Dominion has bought, constructed and is building more fracked gas infrastructure including the Cove Point liquefied natural gas export terminal in Maryland, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline running through Virginia, and other facilities across the Mid-Atlantic region.<sup>16</sup> Dominion

even operates nearly 14,000 mostly fracked gas wells in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>17</sup>

Natural gas is no climate solution: gas-fired power plants emit greenhouse gases, and natural gas infrastructure leaks the potent greenhouse gas methane that warms the climate.<sup>18</sup> Dominion's sprawling gas infrastructure threatens the climate, destroys the environment along pipeline routes and perpetuates the corrosive impacts of fracking.

## 5. Resisting renewable energy

The climate crisis requires a dramatic shift away from fossil fuels. Virginia is especially vulnerable to the destructive effects of climate change. Since 1970, Virginia average temperatures have increased by more than 2 degrees Fahrenheit (about 1 degree Celsius).<sup>19</sup> Rising temperatures and sea levels due to climate change have resulted in saltwater intrusion,

disappearing beaches, and more-intense storms and floods in coastal Virginia.<sup>20</sup>

Dominion has invested in fracked gas despite the rapidly impending climate crisis. The company has referred to wind and solar as "niche players," and less than 6 percent of its national capacity comes from these renewable sources.<sup>21</sup> Most of Dominion's solar power is located far from Virginia or is dedicated to technology titans like Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook.<sup>22</sup>

### Take Action to Stop Dominion's Power Grab:

Virginia must rapidly shift to a real, renewable energy future that delivers solar and wind energy with new policies and investments to foster energy efficiency, public transportation and community-based renewables. Contact your Delegate and State Senator today: [fwwat.ch/VA100Renew](http://fwwat.ch/VA100Renew)

## Endnotes

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