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By [Tom Kane](#)

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## Angry residents confront DNR regarding strip mine

Polite but firm would be a good way to describe the group of Rocky Branch Community residents who showed up at an Illinois Department of Natural Resources hearing Wednesday. The hearing was in regards to Peabody Energy's application to expand the Cottage Grove Mine south of state Route 13 directly into the Rocky Branch Community.

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Eight hundred acres of coal-rich land is the prize that the energy conglomerate is seeking.

Peace, and the quiet enjoyment of their property is the right being fought for by the residents.

Chris Schimp, who, along with family members owns three upscale homes just north of the strip mine was the first to make his case to the state agency representatives. These men will provide input into the decision making regarding the permit application by the mining firm.

"I showed DNR video to prove that infractions and violations were happening and no action was taken by DNR," Schimp said.

He supported his position with photographs of the dust on his property and on the houses belonging to him and his family. Schimp said shaking from the blasting was damaging the structures of the homes.

The clouds of dust followed blasting at the mine he said. Schimp's requests for intervention on the part of DNR have been met with the claim that inspectors must witness the blast in order to take action.

Illinois Mines and Minerals Division Manager of Land Reclamation Scott Fowler confirmed for the assembled homeowners that that was the case.

Fowler led the meeting for the state saying that the meeting was the result of land owners requests.

"We are in the midst of a technical review of the application now. People who live close to the mine have asked for a hearing. That is why we are here tonight," said Fowler.

"We have not done a complete review of that pit at this time. If infractions are found Peabody will have a year to correct them."

John Keller, operations manager of the mine said that a workforce of 200, an annual payroll of \$25 million and 600 mine supported jobs benefit the surrounding area. He pointed out numerous safety awards won by the mine and mentioned that the mine had won reclamation awards also.

Then it was Schimp's turn.

He related how he was in the middle of a 5-year law suit against Peabody for unpaid damages from the mine.

Addressing the panel from DNR Schimp said, "You guys are the last resort. You gotta stop these people.

"You confront them and their response is to lawyer up."

Judy Kellen, township trustee, said she has sought and not received information about the number of acres in Saline County lost to strip pits.

Citing reclamation with clay that prevents ground water from seeping back into the aquifer and blocks the roots of corn plants she asked, "Is it worth it? Are the jobs worth it?"

"It's a monster corporation from outside pulling all the puppet strings."

Representatives of two environmental groups, Sierra Club and Prairie Rivers Network also spoke, supporting the contention that strip mining as currently practiced does not adequately compensate or protect both the land the local residents.



PHOTO/ TOM KANE PHOTO

Chris Schimp addresses IDNR at the hearing on the Cottage Grove expansion. He said blasting is damaging property owned by his family.

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