

## ***A local effort to tackle climate change Climate: Power plant operator says changes have been made***

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### **Body**

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Addressing **climate change** is at a critical point, according to Lake County leaders and environmentalists who rallied on the Lake Michigan shore Saturday to launch an initiative aimed at combating the issue locally. Extensive flooding in Lake County last month is one example of the destructive consequences of a "**climate** on steroids" that can't be ignored, said Julio Cesar Guzman, an organizer with the Sierra Club, a national grass-roots environmental group. "We saw the impact of **climate change**. It was a burdensome reality," he said in advance of Saturday's event in Waukegan.

Local action is critical because the federal government has "abdicated its role in **climate** leadership," according to the Sierra Club. Lake County Board Chairman Aaron Lawlor joined supporters in introducing the Lake County **Climate** Action Pledge, which urges community leaders and officials to take bipartisan action on the what was described as a **climate** crisis. "If we get a coalition of county, state and federal leaders, we can bite off a piece of that challenge," Lawlor said. The initiative was introduced in front of the NRG Energy Inc., coal-fired power plant, as part of Clean Power Lake County's fourth annual beach rally and cleanup. The pledge has three "pillars": Move Lake County beyond coal, adopt ambitious clean energy goals, and build **climate**-resilient infrastructure. Those goals do not suggest specific measures but are designed to encourage local officials to minimize environmental impacts when considering projects. "How are we building in a smart way that will mitigate the next big rain event?" Guzman explained. Any initiative will include closing the NRG plant, he said. The facility, which produces enough electricity to serve the needs of about 668,000 households, has been a target in recent years for Clean Power Lake County because of air and water emissions. "No one can say we want to tackle **climate change** knowing it's catalyzed by carbon emissions," Guzman said. "It needs to be addressed." NRG spokesman David Gaier said the company has invested \$107 million in additional emission controls at the Waukegan plant and the company meets all laws and regulations. "We promised to modernize the plant and make it cleaner and greener, and that's what we've done," he said. The Waukegan plant produces electricity for a grid covering 13 states and Washington, D.C. Investments there and elsewhere in Illinois have "single-handedly" achieved 64 percent of statewide carbon emission reductions called for in the federal Clean Power Plan, Gaier said. Dismantling that plan by the new administration has been decried by environmentalists. Lawlor said local officials can take actions that have a larger impact, such as revitalizing the lakefront in Waukegan. That would be a boost to the city and the region, but it won't happen with an operating power plant, Lawlor said. "We might as well have an orderly process of what the facility becomes," he said. "The sooner the better on the power plant and the sooner the better on its closure." Gaier said coal-powered plants will be phased out eventually, and he noted the company retired one of the two coal units at its Romeoville plant and converted the Joliet plant to natural gas. However, there is a short-term need for "controlled" coal plants in the power generating system, he said. The company in April met with leaders of the Sierra Club and Clean Power Lake County and said the plant is economically viable and continues to supply affordable and reliable

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power to Illinois consumers, he said. Meanwhile, Lawlor and others urged fellow officials to take action to reduce the county's carbon footprint. "This pledge offers a window of opportunity for civic engagement," Guzman said.

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