

## WISCONSIN PUBLIC SERVICE CORP. TO LAYOFF 74



### **Wisconsin Public Service**

In what may have been the earliest possible notice of layoffs ever made the Wisconsin Public Service Corp. has made an announcement may layoff up to 74 of their workers about a year from now. The layoffs would come from the Wisconsin Public Service Corp. power plants at both Rothschild and Green Bay. The potential future layoffs are being attributed to the increases in what are being dubbed "regulatory costs" by the utility. A representative for the company, one Kerry Spees, did say that the company is looking into ways that they can cut the costs that are associated with environmental regulations. The current plants are relatively old and inefficient coal plants that need significant help in order to be up to the current environmental standards. If the company can cut the costs associated with running the plant to environmental standards then they may not have to let go of the staff at all. "It's not a specific regulation, but as plants get older, they're more expensive to modify to meet whatever changes there are," Mr. Spees told a local reporter. For a layoff that is so far in advance we know a surprising amount about that. Of the 74 employees who are going to be cut, 16 of them come from the plant in Rothschild. That plant currently employs about 186 workers, so while 16 percent is not quite 10 percent of the staff, it is a significant portion. The rest of the job losses will be from the Green Bay facility. The notice came so far in advance because the utility company is required to give at least 12 months of advance notice. This is due to an agreement that they have made with the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 310. As part of their collective bargaining agreement a full year of notice is needed before jobs can be cut. The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 310 declined to make any comment on the local level, but they did release an official statement. In the statement the Power Plant District Director, Mr. Larry Clark, said that the union would like the Environmental Protection Agency to push back their current time line for the new air pollution regulations in order to give the plant more time to refit and renovate. While that may be good from a jobs point of view, but it could lead to other problems with regulatory compliance, if other plants sought out the same extension. The union made no comment on the environmental impact that the extensions might have. Currently the coal-fired units are significantly more expensive to run than more modern facilities. While the specifics on how much the renovations will cost are not being released for the time being, estimates are coming in at a few million dollars. The company is considering closing down some for the older units, simply running them less or converting them to the newer standards, no decisions have been made at the current moment. Some of those options will mean that the facility will need fewer workers.

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