
Dora the Explorer Inhaler

Yesterday, I wrote about a satirical campaign in which anti-coal activists spoofed a Peabody Energy website in order to publicize the link between burning coal and childhood asthma. The satirical campaign included fake child-oriented games and discounted asthma inhalers.

But all satire aside, the coal industry really is marketing its product directly to children.

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, a fabulous organization that works to address negative impacts of commercial culture on children, is working to let people know about the coal industry's work with Scholastic, the leading for-profit publisher of children's books, to develop a fourth-grade pro-coal curriculum. According to the Campaign:

> [T]he coal industry, through the American Coal Foundation, hired Scholastic to produce *The United States of Energy*, a slick, full-color curriculum designed to paste a smiley face on the dirtiest form of energy in the world. Scholastic has distributed tens of thousands of these materials to 4th grade classrooms around the country. Teachers are told that the curriculum aligns with national standards because the lessons teach children "that different types of energy (e.g., solar, fossil fuels) have different advantages and disadvantages." The lessons do extol the advantages of coal, but they fail to mention a single disadvantage.

Here's a related article reprinted from the magazine *Rethinking Schools*, discussing the coal curriculum in detail.

It's important to note that mining, transporting, and burning coal causes many health problems besides asthma. This recent post at the DWG blog does a good job summarizing and linking to recent research on the health impacts of coal, and this slightly older post by David Roberts at Grist also has good information. Someone should make sure our elementary-school kids learn about this, as well as about potential alternative sources of electricity generation.