

Villagers demand move to safer area

Their areas poisoned by mining pollutants

Apiradee Treerutkuarkul

The senate panel on public health has urged the government to relocate villagers in Lampang's Mae Moh district to a safer place.

Panel chairman Weerapong Sakolkittiwat said the government should help the villagers who were suffering from health problems stemming from lignite mining in the district.

Villagers seeking relocation yesterday asked the panel for help after they were turned down by both the Energy Ministry and the Electricity Generation Authority of Thailand (Egat), which runs a lignite-powered plant at Mae Moh. They also asked the panel to scrutinise the Mae Moh lignite-mining project.

Luecha Yantsri, a tambon administration organisation member, said more than 20,000 people living in the area had suffered from air and water pollution since Egat opened the mine in 2002.

"How can we live in such a poisonous area?" he said.

"The government must move us out because thousands of people here are in danger," he said.

Tests by the Office of Environment Policy and Planning showed the lignite mine had released sulphur dioxide into the air and contaminated the area's water sources.

Waterways were found to have a sulphate level of more than 10,000 milligrammes per litre, far above the 250 mg/l standard for drinking water.

Villagers were also affected by heavy metals released during mining operations. Most had skin and breathing problems. Provincial health officials said the villagers should be moved to a new location at least 5km away from the plant.