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## Union members hit hard by coal plant closings



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We've got a bit more detail on [the closing of two southwestern Pennsylvania coal-burning power plants](#) later this week.

**FirstEnergy Corp.** (NYSE: FE) is going ahead with the shutdown of Hatfield's Ferry and Mitchell power stations in Greene and Washington counties, south of Pittsburgh. The closings, announced in July, take effect Oct. 18.

There are about 390 employees at the two plants, which FirstEnergy said had to close due to the high cost of current and future environmental regulations.

[Bob Whalen](#), president of the Utility Workers Union of America System Local 102, told me today that 160 union members will either be laid off or have to retire by the end of December. Most of the layoffs will be official Oct. 18, with a handful of union members -- about 30 -- who will be working to close the plants for good. No buyers have been found for the plants, and the **PJM Interconnection**, which operates the region's electrical grid, has found the megawatts taken offline with the dosing of Hatfield's Ferry and Mitchell won't affect reliability.

There is a little bit of good news for some employees of the two plants, but not much.

"About 20 members will have bumping rights into the distribution (wires and poles) side of the company and force those folks to be laid off. No members will be placed into any new jobs," Whalen told me.

FirstEnergy sent me this statement Tuesday afternoon:

"FirstEnergy remains committed to closing both Hatfield's Ferry and Mitchell in a safe, secure and environmentally responsible manner. Beginning Oct. 19, the plants will be operating on a reduced staff (approximately 26 employees at Mitchell and 52 employees at Hatfield's Ferry) conducting activities to prepare them for final shutdown status. FirstEnergy continues to negotiate in good faith and hopes to reach an agreement with the union very soon."

As far as nonunion members who were working at the plants, I don't have an answer yet.

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